QUEER DESIRE AND NARRATIVE FICTION IN THE WORKS OF COLETTE, RENEE VIVIEN AND NATALIE BARNEY

by

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ABSTRACT

SOPHIE YATES. Queer Desire and Narrative Fiction in the Works of Colette, Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney. (Under the direction of DR. LARA VETTER)

At the conclusion of the nineteenth century, Europe bore witness to what Lynne Huffer has termed "a crisis in sexual definition", stemming from the gradual shift in popular conceptions of non-normative sexual acts as behaviors monitored by ecclesiastical authorities to symptoms of identities meant to be categorized and studied by the developing medical and psychological professions. As a result of this shift to the study and monitoring of sexual behaviors, those who attempted to record or define their own experiences as what we would now term queer individuals found their experiences often contradicted and countermanded by the identities outlined and defined by the medical professionals of the time. In this thesis, I examine the fictional works of three queer women writers whose work spanned the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in France: Colette, Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney. Basing my analysis in the theoretical works of Leigh Gilmore, Sidonie Smith, Sashi Nair, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar regarding women's autobiographical practices and the encoding of queer experience in modernist fiction, I examine the ways in which autobiography and fiction intertwine in the works of these three women. In so doing, I argue that Vivien, Barney and Colette used their works to push back against the voyeuristic gaze both of male readers and medical professionals, creating new avenues of queer women's expression that were both intensely subjective and highly relational in their depiction of queer literary relationships and communities.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: WHAT FRANCE DID NOT TAKE AWAY

Europe, in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, experienced what Lynne Huffer has termed a "crisis of sexual definition" (72). As Michel Foucault has masterfully outlined in his introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, the end of the eighteenth century saw the start of a slow shift in perspectives on what he calls "peripheral sexualities", a shift in which the policing of sexual behavior was removed from the moral jurisdiction of the church and placed into the scientific purview of the developing fields of medicine and psychology (38-40). The shift from ecclesiastical to scientific scrutiny of sexual behavior resulted in the categorization of non-normative sexualities as representative of an aberrant identity or personage, a move that typified non-normative sexual behavior as indicative of a physical or mental imbalance rather than a moral lapse on the part of the individual (40). This gradual move towards the pathologizing of sexual behavior reached what could be termed its apotheosis in the period that bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when a series of sexologists began publishing their works on the various types of "perverse" behaviors and sexualities. In so doing, these medical professionals created a narrative formula of definition and first-person testimony that cemented non-heteronormative expressions of gender and sexuality into terms of identity as wide-ranging and oddly specific as "urning", "invert", "transvestite", "eviration", "defemination", "antipathic sexual instinct", "transsexual", and "homosexual" (Krafft-Ebing 286-297; Heaney 138).

It is imperative to note that this strict categorization of non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality applied itself most effectively to public manifestations of sexual feeling or gendered expression. As such, what Lawrence Schehr describes as the "public-

private division" within the gendered and sexual cultures of the time became all-important in the determination of which groups came under the scrutiny and moderation of the newly developing fields of medicine and modern law (13). Within this "private/public" dialectic, as Sashi Nair writes, women, who were "located…within the private sphere" of the home and family, often escaped what Eve Sedgwick describes as the ability to "be gay, or to be potentially classifiable as gay" (Nair 3; Sedgwick 54). This led to a strange state of affairs in which women were less likely to be prosecuted or ostracized for their same-sex behaviors or desires but were also less likely to have their sexuality or romantic desire (of any orientation) taken seriously by both scientists and arbiters of popular culture. Harry Oosterhuis points out that women, who were often defined as "largely asexual beings", were believed to be motivated by "the desire for love" in their relationships, and were therefore considered to be unlikely to pursue anything other than normative heterosexual marriage (31).

This utter disbelief in the presence of desire in women (heterosexual or homosexual) in scientific and psychological circles, curiously, bore no reflection in the popular literature of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose inversion theory of gender and sexuality remained culturally dominant from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1920's, wrote in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* that, "Because woman (whether sexually inverted or not) is by nature not as sensual and certainly not as aggressive in the pursuit of sexual needs as man,…the inverted sexual intercourse among women is less noticeable and by outsiders is considered mere friendship" (396). "It is", he continues, here significantly, "a remarkable fact that in fiction lesbic love is frequently used as a leading theme" (396). In a curious combination of cultural factors, lesbian

relationships, although considered to be extremely rare if not nonexistent by members of the developing fields of sexology and psychology, were a popular staple in European and British literature of the time, especially in novels written by men: Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Catulle Mendès's *Mephistophela* serve as excellent examples of the predatory lesbian figure that would become archetypical by the turn of the century (Gilbert & Gubar 221). A result of this strange dichotomy in which lesbians were seemingly nonexistent in the purview of scientific circles but overabundant (in a certain form) in literature was a construction in which a first-person perspective upon female-identified same-sex desire was consistently silenced. If such a perspective was allowed to exist at all, it was written by a man within the parameters of the particularly unflattering and pejorative stereotype of the demon lesbian.

This construction of the lesbian in the popular imagination as an entity both fictional and essentially demonized created a situation in which writers who themselves identified as lesbian or queer women experienced specific and inherently difficult challenges in their efforts to portray their experience in their fiction and nonfiction. Elizabeth English writes that, in the publishing world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "sexually dissident material of any kind…authored by men or women, had the potential to be construed as obscene and to provoke the authorities" (3). English notes, however, that the considered obscenity of a literary work was "informed heavily by a fear of the obscene authorial body" that had created it (7). Therefore, the existence of texts featuring lesbians or lesbian desire was less likely to be considered obscene if the writer did not identify or was not identified by others as a female lesbian. Although English's focus is based more in the British publishing world of the 1920s and

particularly in the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, her tying of the obscene text to the obscene body that had produced it illustrates a set of conditions in which lesbian or atypically gendered individuals perceived as women were at a material disadvantage in the publication of their experiences and points of view.

The sapphic literary community that developed around the Parisian salon of Natalie Barney in the early 1900s provides ample textual and biographical examples both of the challenges faced by the female lesbian[1] writer and the inventive and imaginative ways in which these challenges were faced, described, and overcome within the work of individual writers. Shari Benstock, one of the first to create a comprehensive biographical and critical study of the women working and writing in Paris at the *fin de siècle*, makes note of the literary freedom made possible to English and American *émigrés* to Paris during this time, quoting Gertrude Stein's assertion that "'It was not what France gave you but what it did not take away from you that was important'" (13). It was certainly understood by Barney and her contemporaries that, in the words of David Rose, "the particularly fluid nature of Parisian identity, where little was quite what it seemed, permitted an easy slippage between gender roles" and the sexual behaviors that accompanied those roles (363). The Parisian "laissez-faire attitude towards homosexuals", which, as Karla Jay notes, had been taken advantage of by expatriate Americans and Britons long before the appearance in Paris of Natalie Barney, Gertrude

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1 A note on terminology: As my subjects all identified as women (in fact, Shari Benstock notes that Barney in particular emphasized femininity in her performance of her lesbian identity, objecting to "any form of dress or behavior that suggested homosexual women were really men trapped in women's bodies"), I therefore refer to them as such (11). Additionally, although Colette tended to reject labels, both Barney and Vivien would most likely have identified themselves with a Sapphic lesbianism. When neither of these terms seem to describe what my subjects express in their works, I have resorted to the term "queer" as a reflection of the fluidity that they, occasionally, express towards questions concerning their sexuality and gender.

Stein, Renée Vivien, or Radclyffe Hall, applied itself the literary scene as well (8). Because literary lesbians had long been featured in French literature in the works of Mendès, Baudelaire, and Pierre Louÿs the French literary market provided a more open opportunity for women attempting to write their desires authentically and fully. Such a heady combination of both literary and sexual freedom made Paris of the 1900s an ideal place in which to develop a literary language for lesbian relationships and the expression of love between women.

For the purposes of this project, I will focus on the writings of Natalie Barney, Renée Vivien, and Colette. All three women, in their careers as writers, experimented heavily with the boundaries between fact and fiction in their writing, to the extent that many critics and scholars continue to read their fictional works as factual accounts of their lives and the lives of their friends and lovers. This blurring of fact and fiction is by no means peculiar to the work of these three women: As Leigh Gilmore famously states, because the inherently gendered autobiographical form has traditionally remained "closed" to women, women have historically chosen "forms other than straightforward, contractually verifiable autobiography for self-representation" (96). The work of Barney, Vivien, and Colette does, however, provide a relatively unique examination of early feminist modernist experiments with the boundaries between fact and fiction because these three women happened to have spent a great deal of time in each other's company. Moreover, they all made a continuous practice of fictionalizing their encounters with each other in their published works. Colette's biographical sketch of Renée Vivien, her former neighbor, in *Le Pur et l'impur* (*The Pure and the Impure*) is still considered to be one of the defining descriptions of Vivien by biographers and critics alike, while her

portrayal of Barney as the comedically predatory lesbian Flossie in the *Claudine* novels serves as a fictional portrait of "*l'Amazone de Lettres*" ("the Amazon of Letters", as she was named by Remy de Gourmont) at the height of her powers as seducer and literary salonist (Rodriguez 195). Similarly, the romantic relationship between Barney and Vivien, although relatively brief, informed an overwhelming majority of their creative output throughout their lives. Their early poetic works were demonstrably written in conversation with each other, and both created potent fictional portraits of one another, with Natalie Barney serving as inspiration for the *femme fatale* Vally/Lorély in Vivien's *Une femme m'apparut* (*A Woman Appeared to Me*) and Vivien for the tragic love interest Stella in Barney's *The One Who Is Legion*. The personal and creative closeness that these three writers shared, and the crucial moment in which they shared it (both in terms of their own lives and in terms of the queer literary history to which they contributed), lends a huge amount of importance to the texts that developed out of their encounters with one another. At the same time, the awareness of all three women of the parallels that would likely be made between their personal lives and the content of their literary works resulted in a concerted desire to avoid direct identification with their work or their characters. This desire was achieved by each in a myriad of ways, including the use of pseudonyms (Colette and Vivien), the re-introduction and revamping of archaic literary forms (Vivien and Barney), and coded language and literary allusion (Colette, Vivien, and Barney). Perhaps most effectively, each author made the decision not simply to trouble the concept of an authorized lesbian identity, but to challenge to concept of a concrete or categorizable identity in itself.

In the works discussed in this project, Colette, Vivien, and Barney repeatedly reframe their sexualities and gendered identities within intervening constructs of cultural traditions of same-sex desire, authorial persona, narrative and subjective voice, and gender performance. Through various manipulations of their narrative personae, Barney, Colette, and Vivien focus upon the nature of an approved authorial persona and intentionally manipulate and recast that persona repeatedly. In so doing, they each deliberately call into question the idea of a fixed or given identity (and in turn, the attachment of that identity to a known set of gendered or sexual behaviors). Either by manipulating, obliterating, or multiplying the narrational persona in their various works, Barney, Colette and Vivien create a body of literature that argues for fluidity of gendered and authorial identity in the connected realms of lived experience and crafted authorial output.

In discussing the work of these three authors, it becomes crucial to contextualize their works within the larger corpus of theoretical and critical work that has developed around women's writing and, particularly, queer women's writing at the beginning of the modernist period. Colette, Vivien, and Barney were all working within the frameworks of a publishing culture in which to record any kind of authentic female experience and publish it under one's own name was at once not to be taken seriously by the literary world and to be considered inherently suspect. Leigh Gilmore famously recalls, in the opening pages of her examination of autobiographical elements in women's writing, attempting to locate (both physically and intellectually) the woman's autobiography itself: "Not only", she writes, "could I not find women's autobiographies in critical studies, I could not consistently find them catalogued and shelved as autobiography in

bookstores or libraries. Once I had found something that looked like an autobiography by a woman, an interpretation that already found me immersed in a problematical exercise in conjecture, how would I read it?" (3). Although Gilmore's lamentation of the seemingly deliberate mis-categorization or outright exclusion of women's experience in the literary world dates from the 1990s, it finds its echoes some sixty years earlier in Virginia Woolf's trolling of the bookshelves of the British Museum for a woman's experience, only to find "a very queer, composite being" largely constructed of men's writing, a creature who "pervades poetry" while being "all but absent from history" (Woolf 43). The pervasive absence of the woman writer, let alone the queer woman writer, is explained somewhat by what Gilmore refers to as the "necessary evasion" of the "title page", in which women employed "not the signature, but the pseudonym, not the family name, but 'Anon.'" in order to achieve publication (81). Through the often-practical necessity to either obscure their own identity or to encode their experience in alternative forms, Gilmore argues, women became comfortable with the deferring of the authorial and narrative persona onto a fictional other who could bear the brunt of public scrutiny. This deferral of the self onto the autobiographical text (rather than onto an explicitly designated autobiography) creates a situation, in much of the fiction and nonfiction written by a woman, in which, in the words of Sidonie Smith, "trying to tell the story she wants to tell about herself, she is seduced into the tantalizing and yet elusive adventure that makes her both creator and creation, writer and that which is written about" (46).

While Smith argues that the "multiple directions" into which such narratives tend to "explode" prevent the woman writer from "captur[ing] the full sense of being" attached to women's experience, this multiplicity of direction and persona can also be

harnessed as a means of safely encoding personal experience in the written text (46). If, as Judith Butler states, “the presumed universality and unity of the subject” as individual and gendered individual is, by its very nature, inherently suspect and subject to critique, then the translation of experience into multiple identities and selves through the act of writing begins to present itself as a viable alternative to the “narrative artifice” that “privileges” a unified “presence, or identity, that does not exist outside language” (Butler 7; Smith 5).

When applied to the writings of queer modernist women, moreover, such intentional shattering of the presumably unified self through the medium of fiction writing becomes, if anything, of a simultaneous necessity for reasons of practicality in a hostile publishing world, self-preservation, and, of course, the creation of new forms that might authentically capture untold or mis-told experiences. Nair writes that the American and English women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century created texts that “represented same-sex desire via personal references yet circumvented censorship, mobiliz[ing] a layered, simultaneous address to public, counterpublic, and coterie audiences” in order to safely express and represent same-sex desire (4). This layering of address that Nair describes has, as we have seen, deep roots in the long-existing practices of women’s writing in English and American traditions and was even more vital in an age in which arbiters of legislation were increasingly aware of and willing to prosecute published accounts of queer experience. While addressing the encoding of lesbian sexual experience through the nontraditional forms of speculative fiction, English notes the often crucial difference, in terms of censorship, between a writer who “‘knew’” and a writer who “‘supposed’ when it came to lesbian sexuality”,

proposing that a writer who recorded queer experience without any first-hand knowledge was perceived as less potentially subversive or upsetting to civic order by the regulatory courts of the time (6-7).

Lesbian writers took advantage of the experimentation with the narrating identity inherent, at the time, to queer writing in order to create, as Gilbert & Gubar phrase it, "a collaborative aesthetic", a "lesbian literary tradition as a form of double talk based on an aesthetic of mutuality that simultaneously attracted and disturbed" (223). The unsettling of a unified narrative or narrating persona became, in its self, an act of relation in the works of modernist queer women, bringing them into collaboration with each other both in life and in their writing. Through the refractions of multiple literary gazes and accounts, the many aspects of the individual woman and writer are shown in all of their separate but equally fascinating entities. It is easy to see this desire for curative disintegration in the works of Colette, Vivien, and Barney, who, in their separate ways, refuse both to inhabit a recognizable and unified identity of queer desire even as they cast and recast their lovers and their selves through the abstracting and intermediary forces of persona, mythography, and symbolism. By exploring the link between the encoding of female lived experience and perspective both within atypical public and literary identities and the nontraditional forms of fiction, poetry, travelogues, and nonfiction essays, and the ways in which Barney, Vivien, and Colette choose to encode and record their experiences of same-sex desire, I argue that each writer, in their own distinct way, draws upon both traditions of queer and women's writing in order to create and preserve their own perspectives on desire as it exists and is expressed between women.

Because of the circumstances of the publication of her earliest works, the *Claudine* novels, Colette experienced the authorial difficulties inherent in being a woman writing about sexuality and the expression of sexual desire between women in a way perhaps more extreme than either Natalie Barney or Renée Vivien.[2] Although at first not publicly identified as the author of the *Claudine* novels, Colette was instantly (and at the instigation of her husband, M. Willy, who also claimed authorship of the first two *Claudines*) associated with the impish schoolgirl Claudine. This association was supported and encouraged by an intense production of visual media in which Colette and the actress Polaire, who played Claudine onstage, would alternately portray themselves and Claudine in the photographic portion of a publicity campaign that made the three separate identities of Colette, Polaire, and Claudine effectively interchangeable. This doubling and tripling of personae that accompanied Colette's first foray into the literary world created a dynamic between herself and her audience in which Colette was at once the writer, the public figure, and the characters that she created. In her descriptions of same-sex desire, a topic that abounds within the *Claudine* novels and continued to fascinate Colette for the rest of her career as a writer, the author makes use of her transitive identity as writer/public entity/character in order to blend and confuse the fictionality of the affair between Claudine and Rézi, a woman whom Claudine meets after her marriage to the much-older Renaud.

Colette's depiction of this affair, which she based upon a real one experienced between herself and her friend Georgie Raoul-Duval, transforms Claudine from an

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[2] It should be noted that, while both Barney and Vivien had the financial resources to self-publish, Colette always had to rely on finding a publisher and, in fact, was the only one of these three writers to use writing as a means to make a living.

impassive observer of same-sex desire between other people to an intensely subjective participant in her desire and love for another woman. This deliberate narrative shift becomes instrumental in what develops into a long-form critique of the use of female same-sex desire in fiction as merely a means to titillate and excite a heteronormative and largely masculine readership. By emphasizing the validity of Claudine's desire for Rézi, as well as her growing discomfort with the narrative and libidinal pleasure that the men who surround her derive from her desire for another woman, Colette forces her audience to come to terms with their own roles as voyeurs and complicates the place of lesbian desire in the larger Western literary tradition. Claudine's narrative transitions between performance, voyeurism, and self-obliteration signal a desire on the part of the author to both call attention to the performative nature of women's sexuality in traditional narratives of sexual expression (whether hetero- or homo-sexual in nature) and to explore alternative modes through which an authentic desire experienced between two women might be told in a work of literature. By deliberately manipulating the narrative voice of her protagonist and contextualizing Claudine's desire for Rézi within the intellectual traditions and archetypes of homosexual culture, Colette pushes back against traditional identities of gender and sexuality in order to emphasize the feeling and perspective inherent in the subjective desire of one woman for another.

Both Colette's destabilizing of the masculine hold on general culture and homosexual subcultures, and her insistence upon the decentralization of a concrete sexual or authorial identity, find their echoes in the later writings of the English Renée Vivien (born Pauline Tarn) and the American Natalie Barney. Like Colette, Vivien and Barney both took up their residence in Paris in the last few years of the nineteenth century.

Unlike Colette, both Vivien and Barney publicly identified as women who loved other women. In their positions as both publicly acknowledged lovers of women and cultural transplants in Paris, Barney and Vivien were openly committed to the creation and furtherance of lesbian and sapphic culture. Barney's salon in Paris was well-recognized as a meeting place for lesbian artists, writers, and thinkers. Although much of her writing was confined to short-form poetry, plays and witty epigrams, Martha Vicinus describes these forms as "a means to an end—to constructing a positive lesbian mythology, or to celebrating erotic pleasure, or to demonstrating to women how they could be fulfilled without men" (182). Renée Vivien, similarly, invested much of her poetic output in the exploration of sapphic symbols and the creation of feminist sapphic figures that either challenged contemporary patriarchal archetypes of femininity or actively created new archetypes that could serve as cultural reference for Vivien and her community. In spite or, perhaps, because of their commitment to the revivification of a lesbian literary culture, both often traversed a particularly tricky line between their public and private lives: Both, for instance, predominantly wrote in French in order to avoid scandalizing their respective families in America and Britain. The result is two bodies of work in which the line between public and private identity is purposefully troubled in order to create extensive interrogations of the coherence of an authorial persona or presence.

In my third and fourth chapters, I explore the depictions of lesbian and queer identities in two rare examples of Vivien and Barney's respective forays into long-form fiction: Vivien's 1904 and 1905 versions of her novel *A Woman Appeared to Me,* and Natalie Barney's 1930 novel, *The One Who is Legion*. Although both of these works play with and manipulate the identity or identities of the narrator, they do so in very different

ways. *A Woman Appeared to Me,* which was written in the aftermath of the conclusion of the affair between Barney and Vivien, contextualizes Vivien's tale of betrayed love within the creation of a complex web of symbology that recasts a highly personal tale in truly mythological terms. Vivien re-wrote the novel in 1905, following a brief reconciliation with Barney, and the juxtaposition between the two renditions of the novel allows the reader to witness the gradual abstraction of Vivien's personal tragedy into a narrative dominated by archetypes and mythology. Vally, the lover of the narrator in the first version of the novel, becomes the mythical Lorély in the second version. Through the intervening machinations of deployed mythology, rewritten or rephrased Sapphic verse, and repeated use of symbolic sound and image, the story itself becomes progressively more and more removed from the factual details of Vivien's and Barney's affair. The many lovers who come to replace Vally in the affections of the unnamed narrator (all but one proving to be unsatisfactory) are accompanied by a series of overlapping layers of mythological and poetic allusion and symbolism, a technique intended to erase their possible resemblances to real-life counterparts. Moreover, the prevalence, in the first version of the novel, of the woman-poet San Giovanni, whose lamentations against the fools who conflate the details of her work with the circumstances of her life and loves makes up a hefty portion of the original text, is utterly removed in the 1905 version. San Giovanni almost entirely disappears from the revised text, leaving behind only the snippets of her work as remnant evidence that she was ever there in the first place. Through this initial invocation and then almost complete renunciation of a woman writer character who seems to share her own frustration with the identification typically made between herself and her work, Vivien leaves the writing

itself as sufficient artifact both of the author's experience and the author's gendered frustration. In this repeated abstraction of her narrative into terms of mythology and symbology, Vivien moves to both universalize and essentially abstract the identities and feelings of her troubled lovers. In my comparison of these two versions of the same novel, I examine the ways in which Vivien invokes already-existing archetypes and symbols in order to de-individualize both her narrative and the identities and personalities of her characters. I argue, additionally, that this de-specification of her work is linked to a desire to not be personally associated with her story, and, instead, to create a literature of same-sex desire that transcended the specifics of her time and place.

The space of twenty to twenty-five years that exists between Colette's, Vivien's, and Barney's three separate depictions of what is, essentially, a very similar narrative (i.e., the destruction of an affair between two queer individuals) allows ample opportunity for exploration of the changes in the ways in which a story that focused on same-sex or queer desire could be told. Published in 1930, Barney's *The One Who is Legion* adopts an experimental form that essentially de-centers the identity of the central character, employing mythological themes only to de-stabilize and expose them as essentially hollow and inappropriate to a modernizing world. The beginning of her novel, which features a group of spirits coming to inhabit the body of a recent suicide, A.D., upsets from the start all traditional expectations of the trajectory of a novel, choosing to have the end of the main character's life serve as the event that precipitates the action of the book. The spirits, who feel compelled to understand the reasons for A.D.'s suicide, begin a kind of reverse voyage along the traditional arc of the hero's journey, using through the scraps of paper and literary works left behind by the main character as indicators of the crucial

events of A.D.'s life and the reasons for A.D.'s death. Both through her framing of the narrative arc as a literal quest for identity and through her use of symbolic characters whose verisimilitude and narrative importance come into question, Barney unsettles traditional techniques of narrative in order to create a depiction of a non-normative identity that is, through Barney's use of the narrating spirits, purposefully incoherent. This deliberate move away from a single narrating voice in the examination of gender and desire within the text emphasizes the mutability of persona in gendered and sexual expression within the novel. Barney supplies, as a replacement for the lost coherence of identity inherent in A.D.'s narrative trajectory, the existence of the written artifacts left behind by the departed life as a more fractal and far more true representation of the person and persona now departed. By insisting upon an understanding of her novel's central figure that categorically forgoes anything resembling a unified or universal subject, Barney not only questions the totalizing effects of gender, but of identity itself. Importantly, in this novel, one can see the effects of a decidedly modernist aesthetic that Vivien missed (by virtue of her death in 1909) and in which Colette, for the most part, chose not to take part. Departing from her earlier decadent influences (although never quite abandoning them), Barney provides an often-overlooked example of the benefits that modernist aesthetics could bring to queer expression, using disjointed and highly subjective language to describe an identity made better through its own disintegration. Through an examination of Barney's wildly experimental uses of narrative technique and style, I interrogate how the female queer novel began to adapt and change with both the increased visibility of women in the public sphere and the increase in the number of

examples of the queer individual as written by the queer individual in both fiction and nonfiction works.

Barney, Vivien, and Colette were all acutely aware, in the crafting of their own work, of the existence and curated use of texts and traditions that celebrated the beauty and complexities of *male* queer expressions of desire, and the purposes that they served to create queer subcultures and counterpublic spaces for gay and queer men. Vivien, for instance, has her androgynous character San Giovanni cite Mendès's *Mephistophela* as the first literary example of a lesbian that she encountered as an adolescent, while Colette features a laundry list of famous historical and contemporary homosexual writers and thinkers (including Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Tennyson, and Walt Whitman) in her second installment of the Claudine series, *Claudine à Paris (Claudine in Paris).* Through the contextualization of their portrayals of female-identifying queer desire within the framework of these pieces of literature that, as a whole, create a cultural point of reference for straight and gay men, Barney, Colette, and Vivien separately highlighted the absence of the female voice in discourses surrounding same-sex desire. In drawing attention to these blank spaces in literature, they sought, in the recording of their own experiences and the experiences of women with similar desires to their own, to create and revive a queer subculture and sense of history for women writers.

As Gilbert & Gubar point out, the revival of Sapphic poetry and women's translations of Sappho blossomed in the years immediately preceding and following 1900 (229). The repeated attempts made by multiple authors to forge "a collaboration with Sappho by celebrating a Mytilene that had faded in to literary history" sparked, in a sense, both a desire to create a line of queer women to hearken back to and a community

of queer women artists to preserve (223). In her recent project on the unpublished biographical works of queer modernist women writers, Melanie Micir designates the recordings that Virginia Woolf, Radclyffe Hall, Djuna Barnes, and Gertrude Stein made of the lives of their beloveds as "an activist genre undertaken in late career by queer feminist writers determined to resist the marginalization and exclusion of their friends, colleagues, lovers, companions, and wives from dominant narratives of literary history" (3). This impulse to record, whether it be through translation, collaboration, poetry, fiction, biography, autobiography, or epigram, must be read in its very existence as an act towards the establishment of a lineage and a preservation of the memories and experiences of a very particular set of women in a very particular time. This desire to establish a tradition both of queer women's writing and queer women's lives has, in a certain way, been recognized for what it is in the very cultures and communities that Barney and Vivien (and, to a lesser extent, Colette) would have wanted to reach through their writing. Writing in 1973, Bertha Harris records the sense of inheritance that she receives in reading Vivien, Barney, and Djuna Barnes, noting that, "like every other dyke with a book in her hand, I know that these are the women our fathers stole us from" (79). My own second-hand copy of *Portrait of a Seductress*, Jean Chalon's 1976 biography of Natalie Barney (translated into English in 1979), bears this inscription in a curved, purple-inked and careful calligraphy, two entwined Venus symbols serving as signature:

> Natalia: It is enough of honor for one lifetime
>
> To have known you better than the rest have known you.
>
> The shadows & colors of your voice
>
> Your will, immutable and still as stone.

You will always be loved & remembered by your many beloved sisters.

This inscription, so deeply personal in its claim to the inheritance of the story of Natalie Barney, bears out the importance of what these three women writers, in their entirely separate ways, were attempting to accomplish. By wresting away the narrative of the lesbian woman from the grips of prurient male writers; by crafting versions of how a recorded queer experience as felt by a woman could and might be expressed; and by refusing to acknowledge or respond to the "biological theories of sexuality" and the "juridical conceptions of individual forms of administrative control" that wielded them, "limiting the free choice of the indeterminate individua[l]", Colette, Vivien, and Barney created three very separate examples of what a queer literary lineage for women might be (Foucault viii).

In my examination of the works of Colette, Natalie Barney, and Renée Vivien, I explicate the various ways in which their uses of narrative voice and identity, mythological and cultural traditions of homosexuality and queerness in classical and contemporary cultures, and alternating destabilizations and invocations of traditional form and styles served to undermine contemporary definitions of sexual and gendered identity. In openly refuting the identity-driven definitions of same-sex and queer desire as defined by the predominantly male sexologists and psychologists of the early 1900s, Colette, Barney, and Vivien each sought to counteract these definitions with their own intensely felt experiences and authentically recorded experiences of desire for other women. This work is not intended as a claim that these writers were, in any way, trailblazers or revolutionaries in their desire to craft a voice for queer women in their writing (they themselves would have claimed a lineage that stretched back to Ancient

Greece). Rather, I argue that they were among the first in a period of rejuvenation and reclamation of the lesbian identity and, as such, their writing proved to be greatly influential both in its insistence upon a recognition of a queer women's tradition in historic and contemporary literature and its use of novel and schismatic forms of narration, authorial persona, and subjective identity. Their dedication to the very act of recording of their experiences, as women who openly loved and conducted their affairs with other women, aided in creating new avenues of possibility in queer writing that would have far-reaching effects both cultural and literary, both in their time and in those of subsequent generations of queer women writers.

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CHAPTER ONE: VOYEURISM AND NARRATIVE REBELLION IN THE WORKS OF COLETTE

Colette begins *Mes apprentissages* (*My Apprenticeships*), her memoir of her early years in the Parisian literary scene, with a series of anecdotes that depict various characters in positions of what could most accurately be described as willful and pleasurable dissimulation: A young man who only pretends to drink alcohol and smoke opium in order to obtain "the fleeting intimacy" accomplished between fellow debauchees, a young girl who hides herself in order to hear her mother desperately looking for her, and a woman who turns herself into a *femme fatale* in order to satisfy the dark fantasies of her lover (1-5). These instances of ordinary and fantastical perversity, seemingly deliberately generalized across ranges of age and gender, serve as what Judith Thurman describes as literary and symbolic "caryatids" that "support" Colette's account of her early literary and sexual life (67). The "mistrust, defiance [and] spiritual emptiness" exemplified in these characters, coupled with "the virtuosity of their lies", serves as an accurate depiction of the superficial atmosphere of the literary scene of *fin de siècle* Paris that is the background for Colette's account of her early adventures and exploits (Thurman 67).

While Thurman seems all-too-aware of the gentle disdain with which Colette views these ordinary-turned-archetypical characters, she seems to elide or remain unobservant of the "place of honour" that Colette assigns to the meaningless practices of deceit evidenced in each of these introductory narratives (Colette 6). It is not the deceit but the "virtuosity" of that deceit expressed by the young man, the child, and the woman, that takes on an importance for Colette and the story that she desires to tell (Thurman 67).

In each of these anecdotes, Colette is careful to emphasize the self-knowledge of the performer in question. She recalls asking the young girl what she "will do worse" when she reaches the age of twenty and notes with amusement the girl's answer that she will "find something" (5). Each character is aware of the nature and severity of their duplicity, and the lack of meaning behind their desire to practice such dissimulation. Nonetheless, the commitment that each character has to their particular brand of deceit seems to bestow a kind of innocence upon their material actions. Each example of deception that Colette offers up to her audience's scrutinization does, additionally, result in material consequences: the man is welcomed in among the drunks and opium addicts, the child's mother becomes distraught, and the woman's lover dies (6). Because the lie gives way to an encounter with what could be considered a form of truth, it becomes justified in its practice.

Colette's decision to begin a memoir that putatively focuses on her early literary and sexual escapades with these three introductory anecdotes indicates her personal feelings towards the act of writing as a practice in deceit. Like the characters that she describes in these opening passages, Colette engages in the formulation of meaningless, pleasurable lies that are justified through the material reactions of joy, empathy, or titillation that they evoke in the readers of Colette's novels. This metaphor for writing places particular emphasis on the pleasure experienced by the writer (or liar) in witnessing the real effects of their writing in the reactions of the person that they have duped through the artifice of fiction.

Important, too, in these anecdotes, is the role that Colette herself plays in relation to the people whose stories she is telling. She makes it clear, for instance, that the young

man who pretends to drink and smoke “could not help telling” her of his secret, in spite of the fact that she “neither doped nor tippled” herself (4). The young girl, similarly, allows Colette to witness her “game” with her mother, asking for no “promise or complicity” from Colette but instead simply seems to be “overcome with the bliss of confession”, “as other sinners were”, Colette notes, “in later years” (5). All of Colette’s authority, in these early passages of the memoir of her own life, lies in her positioning, as Margaret E. Gray phrases it, “at some remove from the stage, neither spectator nor performer nor producer...[enjoying] a dispassionate, panoramic vision of the whole” (Gray 203). In this construction of Colette’s writing persona, she engages with both her subjects and her audience in ways that become inherently charged and, one might even say, eroticized. While showing a clear fascination and identification with her subjects’ meaningless and seemingly perverse desires to create fictions in order to produce factual effects, Colette simultaneously places herself on the side of the observing readership, delighting in the caprices of her subjects while maintaining a voyeuristic distance. From the vantage point of this somewhat liminal position as the observer and conduit of her subjects’ acts of self-indulgent deception, Colette enjoys the doubled pleasure of identification and narration.

It could, of course, be argued that Colette’s deliberate distancing of herself from the actions of her characters, even in those works in which she herself operates as a character within the action of the story, is a technique that is developed most prominently in her later autobiographical fiction. However, even in her earliest works, Colette makes use of these same narrational devices. In the *Claudine* series, Colette’s first fictional works, the very act of narration and storytelling is framed as one that is inherently

charged with a sense of power and erotic potential. Colette situates her descriptions of sexual and romantic encounters between women within the context of the lesbian fiction that existed at the time (largely written by men and largely written for the male gaze). By gradually and repeatedly manipulating Claudine's position and perspective as narrator and actor within the story, Colette highlights the performative aspects of storytelling in order to bring her audience into confrontation with their own position as a titillated and voyeuristic recipient of Claudine's narrative. As Claudine becomes progressively self-aware in her role as story-teller/performer, she is forced to consider, somewhat painfully, the potential for herself to be exploited as the source of other people's sexual or voyeuristic fascination. By complicating the lines between narration and performance, Colette creates a highly nuanced depiction of sexual attraction and desire between women that forces the reader to question their own relationship to the narrative, the characters of Claudine and her female lover, Rézi, and Claudine as a narrator.

It is important, in order to fully understand the implications of Colette's plays with narrative voice and perspective, to be aware of the critical and popular interpretations that, during her life and long afterwards, tended to conflate her fictional narratives with the actual events of her life. The blending of reality and fiction that exists in Colette's novels, articles, and memoirs that has always tempted critics, academics, and personal acquaintances of the author to make strong and highly committal statements concerning the purported truthfulness of her work. Maurice Goudeket, Colette's third and final husband, did not choose to downplay the autobiographical implications of Colette's work, writing that, "Because she never described anything that she had not observed, and because she considered creatures and things directly, without any preconceived idea, no

works have better reflected their author" (Goudeket 5). Lynne Huffer, writing about *Le Pur et l'impur* (*The Pure and the Impure*), Colette's 1930s study of both typical and atypical expressions of desire and passion, notes that "the book is usually discussed as a historically accurate documentary account...and is frequently culled for valuable descriptive information" about the sexual lives of both Colette and her real-world compatriots (Huffer 74). Jerry Aline Flieger, similarly, remarks that the positioning of Colette's fiction "at the boundary between life and the literary text" often produces critical interpretations that focus, not on the craft of the writing itself, but on its status as "artifact, evidence about the patriarchal society" (Flieger 1-2). The length of Colette's career, Flieger notes, meant that the author herself was well aware of the inability of the reading public to discern her craft from her truth in her works, leading to a "tendency", on Colette's part, to deliberately "intertwine herself with her fictions, playing a game of hide-and-seek with her reader and creating a highly original brand of ironic humor in the process" (Flieger 3).

Colette's knowing manipulation of her own persona in her literary work was made all the easier by the fact that her careers as writer and semi- notorious public figure commenced simultaneously with the publication of her first book, *Claudine à l'école*[3] (*Claudine at School*), in 1900 (Thurman 115). Colette, in her later career, was always relatively open in expressing her opinion of her first effort as an author. In *My Apprenticeships*, she writes that her early attempts in *Claudine at School* at its sequels, *Claudine à Paris* (*Claudine in Paris*) and *Claudine en menage* (*Claudine Married*),

[3] A note on translation: I have made use of Antonia White's very good translation of the first four Claudine novels for reasons of expediency. However, in key cases in which I examine specificities of language, I have supplemented my own translations in order to more fully pursue my argument concerning Colette's descriptions of expressions of same-sex desire.

reveal a "suppleness of mood that understood so well what was required of it, the submission to every hint" of the editor, her husband Henri Gauthier-Villars (known publicly as M. Willy) (109). This self-ascribed ability to create and adapt a narrative according to the desires of another person reflects also the highly public performance that was expected of her in the aftermath of the publication of the first novel in the series. In a turn of events that has been famously and repeatedly recounted by both biographers and critics, this first novel was published under Willy's rather than Colette's name and was accompanied by a publicity campaign that heavily featured the young Colette as the factual alter-ego of the gamine schoolgirl Claudine (Francis & Gontier 165).[4] By ensuring that the public conflated the characters and personae of his young wife with her fictional counterpart, Willy "surround[ed] [Colette]'s" authorship of the novel with, as she wrote, "something better than mere silence" (59). "'But you know this child has been most precious to me,'" Colette recalls Willy telling their contemporaries in *My Apprenticeships*, "'Oh! yes, she has! Most precious. She has told me quite delicious things about her boarding school'" (59).

Colette was photographed with her husband, the "'Father of Claudine,'" and Polaire, the actress who eventually portrayed Claudine onstage, in a series of poses that highlighted the youth and girlishness of the two women in their relation to the older Willy (Colette 64). In these portraits, arranged for and posed by Willy, the respective genders, ages, and identities of Colette and Polaire are casually and intentionally

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[4] It should be noted that much debate surrounds the extent of M. Willy's contributions to the *Claudine* series. Colette herself maintains, in *My Apprenticeships*, that Willy's influence was minimal from the beginning, although many of her biographers (Judith Thurman and Francis & Gontier are two prominent examples) contest this claim. Interestingly, although both Thurman and Francis & Gontier go to great lengths to contest this one aspect of the narrative of her life that Colette constructs in *My Apprenticeships*, they selectively adopt other aspects of the same narrative as uncontested and factual truths concerning Colette's development as a writer.

manipulated through the use of costume and props. The most famous of these photographs, faithfully reproduced in Wash Westmoreland's 2018 biographical film *Colette*, features Polaire and Colette, in matching hairstyles and outfits that feature the "little white collar" that would come to be known as the "*Claudine*", with a proprietary Willy standing behind them, his hand lightly resting on Polaire's waist (Colette 46). In other images, Colette is posed in schoolgirl dress, her hand poised over a cartoon sketch of Willy that she is in the process of signing as "Claudine"; Polaire coyly perches atop a desk in her stage dress as Claudine; Willy scolds Polaire, who is sitting dressed in a white party smock; and Colette, sitting on the floor, or a chair, confronts a looming and impassive Willy—in one image, she is dressed as a young boy and, in another, as a schoolgirl.

In each of the photographs described above, the identities of Willy, Colette, and Polaire, are clearly captioned at the bottom of the photograph. However, the visual content of each photograph repeatedly recasts Colette and Polaire in competing and converging identities. This process makes their individual personhood at once essential to the visual game established in these portraits and, through their assumption and renunciation of the role of Claudine, essentially irrelevant. In the newly founded tradition of the novelty postcard, Willy sold these photographs for profit and founded and inspired a new campaign of souvenir items and publicity stunts that both popularized the fictional Claudine and the very real Colette and Polaire while irrevocably conflating the identities of these three separate individuals (Francis and Gontier 179). The public's tendency to view Colette as a walking embodiment of the character that she had created was fed further rather than discouraged by the revelation of Colette as the creative force behind

the Claudine novels. This perceived interchangeability between Colette the public figure, Colette the (eventually revealed) author of the works, and Claudine the creation, allowed for and encouraged a self-reflexive approach to persona and perspective within the novels themselves. As a result, Colette could openly comment upon public response to her works within those works, creating an environment in which she and the people who read her novels existed in a kind of indirect dialogue with one another.

This dialogue would become most crucial in the depiction of sexuality and gender expression among the women characters within the novels themselves. In the first and second novels of the series, *Claudine at School* and *Claudine in Paris*, the "rather fiery friendships" ("des amitiés plutôts violentes") between women seem to exist solely for the benefit of the audience's sexual excitement and voyeuristic pleasure (Colette 56).[5] These early depictions of same- sex desire, which are all filtered through the mocking gaze of the teenage Claudine, include enough detail to scandalize readers without going so far as to suggest that any attachment between the women involved might be a serious one. At first, Claudine seems herself to be an initiator of and participant in these affections between women, actively pursuing and attempting to seduce her nineteen-year-old schoolmistress, the "pretty little Mademoiselle" Aimée Lanthenay (Colette 12). When Aimée is, in turn, more successfully seduced by the principal of the school, Mademoiselle Sergent, Claudine retreats and instead assumes the position of a voyeur. She frequently spies on the amorous encounters between these two older women, creating the opportunity for numerous scenes in which Claudine becomes the unobserved witness. This deliberate positioning of herself as the observer of the affair between her

[5] Translation mine.

schoolteachers lends her a type of narrative power and protects her from feeling hurt by the capricious Aimée's desertion.

The manner in which Claudine describes the encounters between the Mademoiselles Lanthenay and Sergent, as Jennifer Waelti-Walters notes, "remains firmly in the lineage of male-centered" depictions of lesbian sexuality in earlier French literature, in that the "sensuality" between the two women amounts to little more than "girlish foreplay to the real business of heterosexual coupling" (67). The encounters that Claudine witnesses between the two women are cursory and partially obscured, highlighting Claudine's position as a fascinated observer while downplaying the seriousness of the sexual nature of the encounter itself. In an exemplary scene, Claudine enters a room to find "Mademoiselle Sergent, sitting in her big armchair", "holding her assistant on her lap like a baby" while "Aimée sigh[s] softly and fervently kiss[es]" her (55).[6] The women are partially obscured, with just enough detail added to suggest sensuality without over-scandalizing the reader. Claudine, as the narrator and observer of this scene, remains essentially apart from these displays of same-sex desire and affection. Having at first delighted in "lay[ing]" her "head on [the] breast" of the fascinating Aimée and allowing her schoolmistress to "strok[e]" her "hair" and "neck", Claudine now takes her revenge on Aimée's younger sister Luce, who she takes delight in "dominat[ing]" but does not "love" (18, 111). As a result, Claudine is able to comment upon and judge these encounters between women without becoming, herself, romantically involved. Moreover,

[6] Antonia White's translation of the text interprets "embrasse de tout son coeur" as "fervently kissing", while a more direct translation would be "embraces with all of her heart." Depending upon the interpretation of the term "embrace" and its cultural implications in 1900, the language that Colette employs to describe the encounter could be more ambiguous than what White has allowed for in her translation.

she compares and commiserates over the unnaturalness of such attachments with one of the male teachers at her school, a Monsieur Rabastens, who agrees with Claudine that the situation between the Mademoiselles Lanthenay and Sergent is “embarrassing” and “not very pleasant” for any “future husband” the women might hope to have (59). Claudine is placed, through her position as observer, on the same level as Monsieur Rabastens, and gains a sense of power through her judgment of the affair between her two schoolmistresses. She becomes, as a result, essentially male in her perspective upon the desires shared and expressed by Mademoiselle Sergent, Mademoiselle Lanthenay, and even the adoring Luce. She is free to detail and relay the sexual exploits of others for the satisfaction of her audience because she, like the audience itself, presumably has nothing to do with such shocking displays of desire and sexuality.

As the books progress, however, Claudine begins to develop a certain amount of self-awareness in her role as ingénue, and her narration begins to point out the calculated effort that goes into the provocation of excitement and arousal, even going so far as to question the audience’s desire for such empty titillation. In *Claudine in Paris*, for instance, the now seventeen-year-old Claudine has a conversation with her cousin, Marcel, concerning their respective love affairs with members of the same gender. In the telling of her brief flirtation with Luce, who, she reluctantly admits privately “attracted [Claudine] more than [she] liked to own”, Claudine realizes that her cousin becomes excited by the story of the relationship between herself and her former classmate (180). “His eyelashes were fluttering, his cheeks stained with crimson, and his pretty nose had turned pale”, she observes, “he wasn’t excited by *me*, of course, but by my story and the details that he hoped to hear!” (251). In this moment, Claudine becomes aware of a man’s

erotic interest, not in her person, but in the scandalous details that she may or may not choose to reveal concerning her relationship with another young woman. She understands and seems to be confidently aware of the inherent *narrative* value of her sexuality, and she begins to understand the ways in which she can use narration and storytelling to gain the attention and interest of the people around her. In this exchange between Marcel and Claudine, Colette seems almost prophetic in her invocation of what Michel Foucault, some seventy-five years later, would describe as the pleasure of the confessional, in which the inscription of sex into "an ordered system of knowledge" by the authoritative listener who maintains control over the narrative of the articulator of the confession, creates a "different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth" (Foucault 71). Colette diverts and translates this act of confession, however, through her emphasis on Claudine's awareness of the pleasurable effects of her confession upon Marcel. She is aware, watching Marcel's face as she tells him of her relatively mild affair with Luce, of how "beautiful" he looks in his excitement and even wonders "what [she] would do" were he to attempt to embrace her (Colette 251). Rather than acting solely as the source of pleasure in her confession to Marcel, Claudine eroticizes what she knows to be a purely impersonal excitement, deriving aesthetic pleasure from Marcel's intellectual and abstract excitement. Later, significantly, she resolves that, having exhausted the "truth" of her relationship with Luce, she must "lie" in order to keep Marcel's attention (265). As she did later in *My Apprenticeships*, Colette introduces storytelling and the art of lying as the ultimate erotic acts, creating them as forces that transcend sexual inclination and override inhibitions in order to create tangible effects from what is essentially intangible and unreal. Claudine's awareness, as a

narrator, of her effect on Marcel can also be interpreted as a direct reflection of Colette's awareness, as an author, of her story's effect on her reading audience. Rather than simply continuing to perform according to the desires of her reading audience, used to consuming a particular "type" of lesbian, Colette deliberately turns her gaze, via Claudine, upon those who, with "eyes that grow enormous", look to her and her story for sexual titillation (266). The self-awareness with which Claudine constructs what she presumes will be a sufficiently satisfying lie serves as a reflection of Colette's own self-aware narration of same-sex desire through the character of Claudine.

Claudine encounters the narrative excitement her sexuality can provoke as a source of pleasure until she understands the limits placed upon her agency, as a woman, to inhabit rather than perform her sexual inclinations and desires. When Claudine marries Marcel's father, the much-older Renaud, she at first gleefully participates in the creation of a kind of mythos surrounding her desire for members of the same gender. During their honeymoon, she and Renaud revisit her old school and make a kind of game of seduction among the young female students, their attentions to these young girls a deliberate evocation of Claudine's "passionate" affection for Aimée Lanthenay (400). As she did in her dealings with the affair between her old schoolmistresses, Claudine unequivocally allies herself with the male observer in the situation, comparing notes with Renaud about the "bundle[s] of charm" evidenced in the developing bodies of the young girl students (396). The detachment with which she evaluates "the standard of looks" in the young girls that she was only very recently one of, reflects her husband's choice to fetishize her own "schoolgirl soul", and they both participate in a kind of "game" that casts the young schoolgirls as non-subjective and passive representations of the only-too-subjective

Claudine (396-397). Because the game of seduction is displaced onto the bodies of the younger schoolgirls, Claudine remains a self-actualized participant in her husband's seduction of the type of girl who represents her own teenage self. Through her participation in the game, she retains her personhood through the active depersonalization of the young students of her former school.

When Claudine falls into an obsessive love for the beautiful Rézi, however, she is dismayed to find the fetishizing gaze of her husband attached to her personal self for the first time. The inclination on Renaud's part to over-sexualize her desire for another woman first becomes evident when he makes it clear that he would not view an attachment between Claudine and Rézi as an adulterous act, even offering to secure them a place in which to consummate their relationship (467). Claudine comes to resent the fact that her husband "smile[s] excitedly, almost approvingly, at the idea that Luce was too loving a friend" to her, "And at the hope...that Rézi might become a luckier Luce" (438). She is hurt, too, by Renaud's determination to insert himself into her affair with Rézi. When Claudine first reveals the possibility that she might have feelings for their friend, Renaud assures her that such a desire between women is merely "a consolation" for the travails of heterosexual relationships and constitutes a "restful change" from heteronormative coupling (439). As Waelti-Walters notes, Renaud's attitude towards Claudine's love for Rézi reflects "typical male views of the period" in which Colette was writing (69). Constructions of female sexuality of the time typically created situations in which married women, who were "seen as primarily heterosexual", "tacitly received 'time off' with [other] women...as long as the arrangement inconvenienced no man" (69). The active pleasure that Renaud takes in the notion of his wife have sexual relations with

another woman precludes the idea that her attraction to another person might have nothing to do with him or his sexual needs.

Renaud describes and experiences the attachment between Claudine and Rézi in highly aesthetic terms, reducing their attraction to each other to a performance relayed and reproduced for his benefit. When he obtains an apartment for Rézi and Claudine to meet, he insists on accompanying them, displeasing Claudine with the "excitement" with which "his eyes [wander] over Rézi" (470). The contemplation of an affair between his wife and another woman is translated into the language of purely external aesthetics as Renaud excitedly describes the way in which the "amber" of Claudine contrasts with Rézi's "dazzling whiteness" (467). While she has, up until this point, been able to choose those moments in which she performs her sexuality for the benefit of another person, Claudine finds herself at the mercy of her husband's lustful scrutiny in her relationship with Rézi. She loses control of the sexual subjectivity that she has maintained up until this point and is placed in the uncomfortable position of being a reluctant performer of what she would prefer to be a private and privately expressed desire for another woman.

The growing discomfort that Claudine experiences as a woman whose same-sex desire is scrutinized by the men who surround her is further complicated when the man who is watching and gaining a certain amount of pleasure from the contemplation of her affair with a woman is, himself, a man who is only attracted to men. The relationship between Claudine and Marcel provides an interesting insight into Colette's early understandings of the power dynamics inherent in a comparison between male and female expressions of same-sex desire. Marcel seems to be, for all intents and purposes, a classic invert out of one of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's case histories. He himself

experiences a certain amount of unpleasant scrutiny and familial ostracism as a result of what his father, Renaud, refers to as Marcel's "utterly revolting" and numerous affairs with other men (438). In spite of the hardship that he experiences as a man who loves men, Marcel's approach to Claudine's affairs with other women is openly exploitative. As it has already been evidenced, Marcel takes a pleasure in Claudine's tales of her sexual exploits that is in some ways similar to his father's.[7] He refuses, however, to acknowledge that her love for a woman might be as serious and noteworthy as the feelings that he has for men. After Claudine relays her fictitious tale of her tryst with Luce to Marcel, she asks him to reciprocate with tale of his relationship with Charlie, a friend of his from school. Marcel evades the question, remarking primly that "friendships that are passionate, but chaste and entirely of the heart are more difficult to tell about" (266). Interestingly, having eagerly pried from Claudine a lie concerning the carnal nature of her attraction to Luce for his own prurient interests, Marcel frames his own passion for Charlie as "chaste" and soulful. Moreover, his narrative of desire between two men, because it is inherently superior to that between women, does not need to be told. Because Claudine is a woman, her sexual adventures (even if they are imaginary) are fair game for exploitation and revelation, while Marcel's affair with Charlie, which he paints as a strictly platonic love, remains off-limits and outside of the realms of discussion.

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[7] The obvious pleasure that Marcel exhibits in his reception of Claudine's tales of her affairs with women naturally calls his own sexuality into question. It is unclear whether Colette intends, through Marcel's fascination with Claudine's sexual escapades, to indicate that his identity might be a little more fluid than the strict cultural categorization from which he derives so clear a sense of pride. It could be possible, as well, that Colette employs Marcel's excitement in Claudine's tale as evidence that the narrative exploitation by men of women's stories for pleasure and titillation exists across boundaries of sexual attraction or orientation.

This exchange highlights the power inequity inherent in the contrast between female and male expressions of homosexuality. Moreover, it becomes clear that the contrast in power enjoyed by men and women who experience same-sex desire is best expressed through the stories and literature to which they have access. As a man, Marcel participates in and is the beneficiary of an already-existing "cultural continuity" of homosexuality that, at the time in which Colette was writing, traditionally relied upon the dispensation of specific books and stories that reinforced and reassured the feelings of desire that men felt for other men (Schehr 16). Colette proves herself to be well aware of the intellectual and literary traditions that dominated and surrounded male homosexuality in her creation of a scene in which Marcel shows Claudine a letter from Charlie, in which Marcel's lover creates a comprehensive outline of the writers and thinkers who form a cultural alternative to the harsh gaze of sexologists and psychologists. Charlie writes to Marcel that, in order to "steep" himself "once again in [his] faith and sexual religion", he has been reading "Shakespeare's burning sonnets to the Earl of Pembrokeshire,... Montaigne, Tennyson, Wagner, Walt Whitman and (Edmund) Carpenter" (292). Through the casual ease with which Charlie is able to identify and name the sources of intellectual and emotional comfort available to young homosexual men, the reader becomes aware of the blooming and easily available homosexual subculture that existed in Europe in the early 1900s. Moreover, Charlie's description of his sexuality as one that is accompanied by cultural artifacts that place it on the level of a "religion" hints at the sense of superiority that could be felt by a man with access to such a subculture and its artifacts. While Claudine's desire for other women remains interesting only in its relational

capacity to excite interest in the eyes of men, Marcel's desire for other men is elevated and purified by the cultural history that he benefits from as a man.

Colette seems to be very aware of this distinction between men and women in their expressions of same-sex desire in her framing of Claudine and Marcel's relationship and conversations concerning their desires. Claudine has witnessed and experienced love and desire between women, but she lacks any kind of cultural context through which to convert that desire into an identity. Her attractions to Luce and to Rézi exist outside of any kind of reinforcing culture that forces her to see herself as different from those around her. She expresses her ambiguous approach to sexuality and sexual expression in a conversation with Renaud, in which she posits that "homosexuality" is "vice" only depending on how "it's practised" and that the true vice would be to "take a lover without loving him, simply because [one knows] it is wrong" (453). While Colette depicts this kind of cultural innocence as an innate positive, she is careful to point out the disadvantaged position that Claudine is placed in as a result of the lack of cultural background surrounding her desire for women. Her feelings for both Luce and Rézi receive protection and encouragement from those closest to her only because they are of narrative or sexual value to the men in her life.

This sense of male hostility towards the female expression of genuine desire for other women, which Colette expends a lot of effort to create in her depiction of Claudine's affair with Rézi, is at its most highly symbolic and conceptualized when Claudine, desperate for some respite from Renaud's influence in her affair, asks Marcel for the use of his "little love-nest" of an apartment for an assignation between her and her lover (480). In the setting of this apartment, Colette cements the thesis that she has

developed concerning the inequity that exists between male and female homosexuality in her description of the room that Marcel is able to offer to Claudine and Rézi. The objects and furnishings that occupy this room suggest both Marcel's non-normative sexuality and, simultaneously, the oppressive presence of his masculinity. The "narrow bed-recess", upon which Rézi and Claudine lie, is "patterned with grayish-green plane leaves" that suggest the "imprints of five fingers" and is lit by an overhead lamp in the shape of an "inverted crystal flower" (483). Rézi points out to Claudine the cushions on the bed, "all covered in rough brocade or embroidered with spangles or gold and silver thread" (483). "A woman's hair", Claudine notes, "would have got pitifully tangled by them" (483). In short, everything in the apartment is at once ornate and essentially hostile to women. The "inverted crystal flower" that hangs over the encounter between these two women is, of course, a literal inversion of a typically vaginal or female symbol ("It *would*", Claudine notes sarcastically, "be an orchid!") (483). The pattern of the bedspread seems to carry the imprints and presence of another, and the pillows threaten to painfully catch at and tangle the hair of the two women who hope to take refuge there. The room, which could have served as a symbol for the similar need for both Claudine and Marcel to hide or disguise their desires for members of the same gender, only highlights the difference between their two desires and the unequal power dynamic that develops out of such difference. This inequity is only compounded by the fact that it is Marcel who, as a joke, rings at the doorbell while Rézi and Claudine are in the midst of their assignation, forcing the two women into a panic in their fear of being discovered (485). Marcel's deliberate and literal interruption of the romantic idyll between Rézi and Claudine makes it evident that he sees their romance as an easily accessible source for his own

entertainment. Both Marcel and his father have ready access to the narrative of Claudine's developing romance with Rézi, making use of their passion for their own ends and circumscribing the attraction that exists between the two women within the demands of their own masculine desires.

Colette responds to this aesthetic and narrative exploitation of the expression of sexual love between women by emphasizing the deep distinction between sexuality as a personal or cultural performance and sexuality as an embodied experience. This is largely carried out through an active and conscious tinkering with Claudine's narrative persona. Colette brings the reader into direct contact with her ingenue's function as a performative narrator/character only then to alternatively erase and multiply that function. In her depiction of the love scenes between Claudine and Rézi, for instance, she intentionally upends and rephrases both Claudine's previous encounters with sexual desire and her use of narrative in order to seduce and bewitch. Unlike Claudine's encounters with Renaud, Aimée, and Luce, she does not act as the aggressor or seducer in her relationship with Rézi. Rather, it is Rézi who endeavers to "overcome" Claudine with her "beauty" and persistence (433). Claudine's first sign of acquiescence to her attraction to Rézi, moreover, is conveyed in her telling of a story to Rézi. Unlike the narratives of her own sexual past that have been the means of creating a bond between herself and Marcel (and herself and Renaud), Claudine's story for Rézi is a flight of imagination in which Claudine takes them on a journey: "Think", she tells Rézi, "that it is night, and possibly we are traveling…Imagine the wind in your hair…lean forward, that low branch might wet your forehead!...Lean against me, take care, the water in the deep ruts in the road is

splashing under the wheels"(145).[8] Rather than plying Rézi with tales of her sexual past with other women, Claudine fabricates an imaginary circumstance in which the two women can be together and alone. The story becomes a participatory exercise, as Rézi leans against Claudine ("follow[ing]" Claudine's "game", our narrator notes, with a "treacherous compliance", and murmurs, "I am travelling" (145). When Claudine asks Rézi where they shall "arrive", Rézi asks Claudine to "lean down" so she can "tell her all", and kisses her (145).[9] Once again, Claudine makes a conquest via the narrative that she constructs, but the circumstances of this story are completely different to those of the stories that she has told before. She is in conversation with Rézi, allowing her soon-to-be lover to take part in the narrative that she constructs and turning her fabrication into a "game" rather than a performance. She is not a performative character in this exchange but a subjective collaborator. The narrative itself, moreover, becomes the driving force for the consummation of desire between Claudine and Rézi. They are, in a sense, travelling, and their arrival is found in each other.

Heretofore, in the novels, scenes of a sexual nature have been depicted and conveyed primarily through allusion or reference. The interludes that a teenage Claudine witnesses between the Mademoiselles Sergent and Lanthenay, as I have noted, are deliberately non-explicit and partially obscured and framed through the gaze and perspective of another. Although the sexual encounters between Claudine and Renaud are relayed to the audience via Claudine's first- person perspective, these, too, tend to be

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[8] Translation mine: "Pensez que c'est la nuit, et que peut-être nous voyageons…Imaginez le vent dans les cheveux…penchez-vous, cette branche trop basse pourrait mouiller votre front!...Serrez-vous contre moi, prenez garde, l'eau des ornières profondes gicle sous les roues…" (Colette 145).

[9] "Tout son corps souple suit mon jeu, avec une complaisance traîtresse. De sa tête, renversée sur mon épaule, les cheveaux s'envolent et me frôlent comme les ramures qu'invente mon inquietude en quête de diversions… 'Je voyage,' murmure-t-elle. 'Mais arriverons-nous?'… 'Oui, Claudine, nous arriverons!' 'Où?' 'Penchez-vous, je vai vous le dire tout bas'" (145).

somewhat indirect in their depictions of sexual acts. Claudine only directly refers to the moments before or after a sexual encounter between her and her husband, describing Renaud "smiling" as he "lies panting beside [her], no longer holding [her] in [his] arms" (375). The sexual act, whatever it might be, is never actively described for the benefit of the reading audience, although Claudine makes it clear that she enjoys a great deal of "sexual pleasure" in her encounters with her husband (374). In both of these cases, the explicit references to sexual enjoyment or sexual acts are vague enough to excite while maintaining a level of detachment and distance in order to not scandalize the intended audience.

In contrast, the passion that Claudine feels for Rézi is expressed, in the love scenes that develop between them, in intense and subjective terms. In her first kiss with Rézi, Claudine does not couch her descriptions of what is happening between them in vague or ambiguous terminology: "For a long time", she relates, "I listened to what her mouth told mine" (146).[10] As the relationship grows more physical, however, Claudine accentuates her own subjective experience of her desire for Rézi, disdaining explicit descriptions for detailed first-person accounts of her own arousal. "Everything melted into wild surrender", she records of the first time that they have sex, "into murmuring imperious demands, into a kind of amorous fury, followed by childish 'Thank-yous' and great, satisfied sighs of 'Ah!' like a little girl who had been dreadfully thirsty and drunk everything down to the last gulp" (471). This depiction of lesbian desire differs greatly from what the audience has previously seen in Colette's descriptions of sexual encounters between women. Rather than using her outsider status to frame same-sex desire as a

[10] "J'écoute, longtemps, ce que sa bouche dit à la mienne" (146).

spectacle or exhibition, or manipulate its truth in order to provoke desire in another, Claudine expresses her desire for another woman in incomplete, fragmented moments of subjectivity that destabilize the light-hearted approach to sexuality that has so far dominated her outlook and perspective. What she previously saw as ridiculous in the love affair between her schoolmistresses becomes deeply personal and vulnerable in her relationship with Rézi. The ludicrous display of Mademoiselle Sergent holding Mademoiselle Lanthenay on her lap "like a baby" is translated into the "little girl" sighs and "childish 'Thank-yous'" of Rézi, turning what had been strange and amusing into something deeply personal and erotic (61, 471). Claudine offers no detached commentary upon her relations with Rézi—she is "aware only of [her lover's] quick, fluttering breath" and "hair so fine that [Claudine] could have guessed its colour merely by the feel of it" (472). The sensory detail with which Claudine describes her lover removes any possibility of intellectual or emotional callousness or cynicism. Rather than performing her desire for an audience, or framing the affairs of others in a humorous or disdainful manner, Claudine couches her telling of her relationship with Rézi in intense sensory detail in order to remove all sense of distance between her relation of her love for another woman and the audience's reception of her narrative.

Claudine has, previously, maintained a commenting distance in her encounters with Renaud, occasionally making it clear that she views her sexuality as a performance. She confidently predicts, at one point, "Tonight...if [her] husband wants [her]—and he will—[she] shall be the Claudine who terrifies him and wildly excites him" (452). However, following the commencement of her affair with Rézi, Claudine is incapable of maintaining such a distinct sense of personhood. She not only loses her position of distant

narrator in her telling of her affair with Rézi; she "annihilate[s]" herself in her desire for another woman, removing her self and her persona entirely in her descriptions of her lover and the embraces that she and her lover share (472). "This will no longer really be Claudine's diary anymore", she writes after their first assignation, "because in it I can talk of nothing but Rézi" (475). It's interesting that Claudine should be at her most subjective, vulnerable, and intimate through this avowal of self-annihilation. By describing her affair with Rézi as one so destabilizing that it removes her own sense of personhood, Claudine effectively removes the concept of herself as a character carrying out her life for the benefit of her audience. If Claudine is no longer her "old, quick-witted" self, if she has actively ceased to be who she was, then she is also no longer the entertainment of her husband, Marcel, or the reading audience itself (475). By placing at the forefront of the narrative her sensory and emotional experience of her relationship with Rézi, Claudine escapes her role as both narrator and performative character. Her experience is reduced to itself, having been stripped of its intervening layers of intent or narrative persona.

This narrative use of subjectivity, of course, remains, to a certain extent, a performance even through Claudine's protestations of authenticity. In some sense, Claudine's first-person descriptions of her affair with Rézi are all the more titillating *because* of their immediacy and lack of narrational distance. It is clear, at this point, that both Claudine and Colette are more than aware of the close association between the acts of writing and storytelling and the act of performance. It is, perhaps, more valuable to interrogate those few moments in which Colette chooses not to present her narrator's story as one calculated to produce an emotional effect. Colette extends the performance

of her for her audience through her accounts of the affair between Claudine and Rézi, but she withdraws her insistence that the audience be aware of the calculated machinations necessary to that performance. As a result, the disjointed nature of Claudine's descriptions of her physical affair with Rézi removes any distance between the audience and her experience. The attraction that exists between the two women becomes an immediate experience for the audience as well. Just as Claudine invites Rézi to share in the narrative that she creates for both of them, through her removal of any intervening commentary or narrative distance, Colette invites her audience to share in the confusion and elation of Claudine's feelings for Rézi. In so doing, Colette crafts a performance of authenticity that frames the affair between Rézi and Claudine as something essentially real, completely recasting and redefining earlier and more male-centric depictions of lesbian sexuality. By making a performance out of subjectivity, Colette, like her caryatid figures in *My Apprenticeships*, makes use of her ability to manipulate her audience in order to create real emotional effects out of the artifice of her authenticity. Like these same figures, her performance attains a certain level of reality because of the real emotions and reactions that it succeeds in evoking. By emphasizing the contrast between a sexuality as performed or put on display and a sexuality as experienced, Colette invites her audience not only to sympathize with the affection between Rézi and Claudine but also to experience it as a real encounter between two people.

Colette's use of Claudine's developing persona as a means to explore the various possible performative and authentic expressions and manifestations of desire becomes even more complicated by the fact that, after *Claudine Married*, the third book in the series, Claudine disappears as the narrator of the series. In the following book, *Claudine*

s'en va (appropriately titled *Claudine Goes Away* but published in English as *Claudine and Annie*), Colette introduces a new narrator, the frustrated and submissive girl-wife Annie, and Claudine appears only at the edges of the narrative as a bewitching, captivating cipher whose confidence disturbs the hesitant Annie (529). Claudine becomes an almost symbolic figure in Annie's narrative, an "irresistible authority" whose "amorous and irritating" union with Renaud seems to reach near perfection (568). Having fought so desperately for subjective power and perspective, she becomes enigmatic and unreachable, one half of the "Claudine-Renaud" coupling rather than an entity unto herself (569).

The disastrous end of Claudine's relationship with Rézi, in which she discovers that Rézi and Renaud are carrying on an affair, seems to signal an end of Claudine's role as self-aware narrator. *Claudine Married* ends with an impassioned letter from Claudine to Renaud begging for the continuation of their marriage, and Claudine's only moments of subjectivity and first-person perspective that follow this plea exist in the letters that she writes to Annie. In one of these, she significantly remarks that Rézi's infidelity with Renaud stemmed from a desire to "give herself the *literary* pleasure of betraying…both" Claudine and Renaud (614).[11] This singular remark, which is one of only a handful of references that Claudine makes to Rézi following the demise of their relationship, allows the reader a possible key into Claudine's retreat from her position as subjective narrator. As I have already noted, Claudine's use of narrative to woo Rézi was significant in that it abandoned any pretense at performance in order to invite Rézi's reciprocation and participation. If, in turn, Rézi's betrayal of Claudine was based in her desire to engage in

[11] Italics mine.

a particular narrative (one that, one might add, re-encircles the love affair between Rézi and Claudine within the confines of heteronormative relationships), then the trust that Claudine has placed with Rézi in allowing room for her collaboration has been both misplaced and inherently misused. Similarly, Colette might have feared that her portrayal of the attraction and shared desire between Rézi and Claudine might, in spite of her best efforts, be misused and re-interpreted within those same heteronormative constrictions.

It's interesting to note, moreover, that Claudine's loss of agency within the novels serves as an almost direct reflection of Colette's growing independence in her own life. The years that followed the publication of *Claudine s'en va* were marked by Colette's temporary separation from Willy, her affair with the androgynous Marquess de Morny (who Colette later immortalized in *The Pure and the Impure* as an example of the "mannish" woman), and her embarkation upon a stage career (Colette 75; Vicinus 184). If one were to do exactly what Colette did not wish and conflate herself and the character that she created, one might almost be tempted to say that Claudine left the page and began living her real life. It might, perhaps, be more accurate to surmise that Colette deliberately chose to take her own subjectivity out of her writing following the completion of *Claudine Married*. In *My Apprenticeships,* she expresses regret at seeing, in her writing in the Claudine series, "allusions, features that are caricatured yet recognizable, tales that come too near the truth", that betray "an utter disregard for doing harm" (60). Later in this memoir, acknowledging her friends, she writes, "Dear friends of twenty years and over, of ten years or less, I will not speak of you here; we like to meet in the quiet places, away from the bright lights and the din. Take care of yourselves, live longer than I do. Thank you" (103). The complicated relationship that Colette developed,

in these first novels, between her own authorial and public personas only became more intricate and intentionally misleading as her career developed. This early example, then, of her examination of female sexuality and same-sex desire, is significant for its use of the authenticity that its reading audience would have presumed in reading it. Knowing that most people conflated her with the character of Claudine, Colette chose to force them to question both that presumption and the obvious pleasure that they took in witnessing the sexual exploits of a female character. Through her use of language that conflates and combines narrative and aesthetic pleasure, Colette transformed a tale originally intended to scandalize its audience into a long-form meditation on authorial persona and subjective understandings of performance and performative desire.

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CHAPTER TWO: IDENTITY AND MYTHICAL ABSTRACTION IN RENEE VIVIEN'S *A WOMAN APPEARED TO ME*

Renée Vivien's legacy as a writer must be understood as one that is inherently troubled, due in large part to the circumstances surrounding the preservation both of her life's story and her life's work. In the spring immediately following Vivien's death in 1909, Natalie Barney, whose affair with Vivien inspired *Une femme m'apparut* (*A Woman Appeared to Me*), perhaps the most well-recognized of Vivien's long-form fiction, published an article in *La Grande Revue*, in which she wrote movingly of the "morbidity" that "did not allow in [Vivien] any desire in her life other than death" (Goujon 431).[12] At nearly the same time, Salomon Reinach, whose "passion" for the works of Vivien was a little "jealous" in nature, entombed her writings with his own in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, with the strict instruction that the works not be viewable to the public until the year 2000 (Goujon 432; Rubin 374). The confluence of these two events—the writing of an article canonizing the life of "near total isolation" that Vivien created for herself and the entombing of her published and unpublished written works—effectively created a tradition of scholarship in which dramatization and elision became the dominating elements in depictions of Renée Vivien's life and work (Goujon 431). From André Germain's "imprecise" 1917 biography, in which he carefully omits names connected with Vivien in order to preserve the reputation of her friends, to Colette's 1932 description of Vivien, "not so much clad as veiled in black and purple", frantically abandoning her dinner guests to attend an anonymous but impossible lover,

[12] Translation mine: "La morbidité qui ne permettait en elle aucun désir autre que la mort" (431).

the more sordid and mysterious aspects of Vivien's remembered life have somewhat clouded her own narrative and authorial perspective (Goujon 432-433; Jay 18).

The result, as Tama Lea Engelking points out, is a rather impressive body of biographical work that recasts the events of Renée Vivien's life in whatever form the given author sees fit: Vivien is, Engelking writes, "called everything from a feminist to a masochist, an anorexic, an alcoholic, a virgin, a devoted Roman Catholic, a pagan, a mystic, a Sappho reincarnated, Baudelaire's daughter, a symbolist and a romantic" in the various biographical depictions that accompany any critical work on her literary output (128). Although it might be easy to suggest that one of these identities was more "true" than the other, the actual circumstances of Vivien's life indicate that, in the middle of all of these different roles and type-castings existed a woman who, in various ways, embodied all of these identities while roundly defying and rejecting definitive categorization. Born Pauline Mary Tarn in 1877, the daughter of an American mother and an English father, Renée Vivien constantly reinvented her identity throughout her life (Souhami 36). As Goujon notes, Vivien alternately described herself as "Norwegian", "Franco-Irish", and "Scots-Irish" to her friends, choosing every conceivable identity except that found in her factually English-American roots (29-31). She was known for her displayed penchant for dress-up: She would enthusiastically inhabit the roles of Lady Jane Grey or Anne Boleyn in elaborate masques that were, occasionally, recorded in the form of photographs which she distributed to her friends (Colette 156).

Colette, who was Vivien's neighbor in the years immediately following her separation from M. Willy, describes Vivien's home as being in a constant state of flux, with items appearing and disappearing as Vivien repeatedly revamped her own identity:

"A collection of ancient Persian gold coins came, glittered, disappeared, leaving in its place glass cabinets of exotic butterflies and other insects, which in their turn gave way to a colossal Buddha, a miniature garden of bushes heaving leaves of crystal and fruit of precious stones. From one marvel to another", Colette writes evocatively, "Renée moved, uncertainly, already detached, and showing the indifferent self-effacement of a guard in a museum" (154). In this vignette, which makes up a part of Colette's *The Pure and the Impure*, both Vivien's propensity to adopt new surroundings and identities and her tendency towards role-play and "self-effacement" are prominently in display. The ever-changing habitat of her home, through which she drifts as a temporary occupant (in Colette's vision, aided by the knowledge of her friend's impending death), seems almost an extension of the mutability of persona that she displayed in both her personal and literary lives.

Colette, too, as we have seen, took delight in costumes and the trying-on of different personae (in fact, she often participated in the same masquerades as Vivien).[13] However, the way in which Colette's propensity to change or alter her identity factored into her writing was essentially different from Vivien's own literary myth-making. As we have seen, Colette eventually converted her own early experiments with multiple or disappearing authorial identities into the creation of a narrative perspective that remained on the outskirts of the action depicted in her written works. Vivien, conversely, often made use of a certain kind of revisionist approach to history, myths, fairytales, literature, and works of art, attempting to redress the critical and creative wrongs done to such

[13] One of Colette's performances, in fact, as a faun in a masquerade organized by Natalie Barney, prompted Vivien to write her poem, "Je Cacherai Ma Flute" ("I Will Hide My Flute"), which she dedicated to Colette (Francis & Gontier 66; Goujon 145).

figures as Vashti, Ophelia, Lilith, Delilah, Anne Boleyn, Andromeda, the Siren, the Undine, Niobe, and Viviane (Goujon 143). In her poetry, Vivien deployed the first-person perspective to allow these mythical, literary, or historical women the opportunity to voice their perspectives on the narratives that had formed around them (narratives in which they had so often remained more or less voiceless). In so doing, Renée Vivien created a body of work that persistently interrogates the literary and mythical traditions of womanhood that had been provided to her and her compatriots by Western society. In "L'éternelle vengeance" ("The Eternal Vengeance"), for instance, Vivien creates a hate-filled and devious Delilah who carefully plans out her revenge against the hateful "son of Israel",[14] Samson (Goujon 443). Both Delilah's position as a "slave and a prostitute", as well as her endurance of Samson's "cruel caresses" take prime position in this telling of the story, transforming Delilah from a morally weak traitor to a justified avenger of the life that she has been forced to live (Goujon 443).

In the critical work that surrounds *A Woman Appeared to Me*, one can bear witness to the culminating effects both of the performance of identity that Vivien created within her own body of work and of the elision of her work as too strongly associated with her life as a very public lesbian in early 1900s Paris. This novel, which Vivien first published in 1904 and then re-released in a heavily revised edition in 1905, is clearly influenced by the events of her relationship with Natalie Barney. The two women, who met in 1900 through their mutual friend, Violet Shilletto, shared a brief but tempestuous love affair that was often defined, and eventually doomed, by Barney's inability to

[14] Translation mine: "Je suis l'esclave et la prostituée…C'est toi le plus haï, Samson, fils d'Israel!...Car, dans le lit léger des feintes allégresses, / Dans l'amère moiteur des cruelles caresses, / J'ai prepare la piège où tu succomberas, / Moi, le contentement bestial de tes bras!" (443).

remain monogamous (Souhami 36; Foster xv). The difficulties that existed between the two women were only exacerbated by the eventual death of Violet Shilletto, who seems to "have embodied something of a spiritual Sappho" for Vivien (Longworth 368). The death of Shilletto, who is represented in both versions of *A Woman Appeared to Me* as the blameless and tragic Ione, had a profound effect on Vivien, and much of the thematic content of *A Woman Appeared to Me* is concerned with navigating the narrator's deep sense of guilt in contemplating her role in Ione's death (Vivien 178).

A Woman Appeared to Me, which was written following Vivien's initial break with Natalie Barney in 1901, published in 1904, and then heavily revised and republished following a brief reconciliation in 1904, makes a kind of art form of either masking or encoding the recognizable details of Vivien's life (particularly her friendship with Shiletto and affair with Barney) in the imaginaries and repeated symbolisms of mythology and literary reference (Goujon 346). By abstracting circumstances very similar to her own heartbreak through the mediating imageries and conventions of mythology, Vivien heightens the affair between the narrator and her *femme fatale*, Vally, into an almost cosmic event. In so doing, she makes the personal circumstances of the encounter, as well as its factual roots in the events of her own life, completely inconsequential. The purpose of this abstraction is made all the clearer in Vivien's revised 1905 edition of the novel, in which Vally is transformed into Lorély, a mythical figure whose coming is foretold to the anonymous narrator by an archetypical figure referred to only as the Annunciatrix.

In the stylistic progressions Vivien makes in her writing and rewriting of *A Woman Appeared to Me* between the 1904 and 1905 editions, one can decipher an

impulse to remove all signs of individual suffering through the intermediary deployment of symbolism, mythography, and intertextual allusion. Through her repeated abstraction of her characters into symbols, figures in myths and legends, and the written texts that they leave behind, Vivien writes and rewrites the identities of both her narrator and the women with whom she interacts. In so doing, she creates a depiction of a love affair that attempts to transcend questions of identity and authorial/narrational personal entirely. Unlike Colette, whose repositioning of her narrator only occasionally descends into the realms of total obliteration (particularly in Claudine's affair with Rézi), Vivien moves towards a form of storytelling that makes the essential identity of its characters a matter of complete inconsequence. She depersonalizes the exact details of her own experienced love affair with Barney to such an extreme extent that the traces of the characters, through their writing, become more important than the characters themselves. In this way, *A Woman Appeared to Me* becomes a love story in which the form is just as important, if not more so, than either the content or its inspiration.

The similarities between the events of the 1904 edition of *A Woman Appeared to Me* and the storied details of Vivien's affair with Barney have provoked a slew of strictly autobiographical readings of both editions of the novel. Brian Stableford, the most recent translator of *A Woman Appeared to Me* from French to English, notes the impossibility, in "reading the 'autobiographical novel,'" of avoiding "trying to read the woman as well as the poetry, especially as the whole point of writing the text, from the author's viewpoint, must have been to 'read' herself" (Stableford x-xi).[15] Diana Souhami, in her

[15] Stableford does note that *A Woman Appeared to Me* "was not published" or presumably conceived as "'an autobiographical novel,' and that countless published first-person narratives are anything but autobiographical" (Stableford xi).

biographical text on Natalie Barney, uses quotes from *A Woman Appeared to Me* to illustrate what was a real-life encounter between Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney (39). Rachel Mesch, similarly, makes a willful correlation between Vivien the writer and her narrator in *A Woman Appeared to Me*, making the stylistic choice to refer to the "unnamed narrator" of the novel as "Renée" (61).

This somewhat reductive treatment of Vivien's text, which is repeated in most critical and autobiographical texts on Renée Vivien, seems to completely ignore the uncomfortable relationship that Vivien herself held with her identity as a publicly recognized woman writer whose main focus was the valorization and legitimization of lesbian love. Like many women writers, Vivien initially chose to mask her gender, first publishing her work under the a-gendered pseudonym "R. Vivien" before changing her nom de plume to the masculine "René", and, finally, in 1903, publishing under the feminine name "Renée Vivien" (Mesch 60). Her writing persona, therefore, was doubly pseudonymous for a time, as she never published under the name "Pauline Tarn."

This heightened sense of privacy surrounding her lived and personal identity was not simply a routine masking of gender, nor was it born solely from a desire to "distance" herself "from her fatherland, her father's name and mothertongue", as Engelking suggests (366). Rather, Vivien had to directly confront the ramifications of her decision to publish, as a woman, work that reflected on and exposed her own personal attraction to women. Following her decision to publish under a woman's name, her work was banned from weekly public readings at the Comédie Française, and her private/official identity as Pauline Tarn was exposed to the public by Charles Maurras, a conservative writer and commentator in Paris at the time (Engelking 127; Mesch 60). *A Woman Appeared to Me*

is a fascinating text not only for the similarities the relationship between its two women bears to that of Vivien and Barney's relationship, but also for its placement in the timeline of Vivien's literary career. Two years after the publication of the second revised edition of *A Woman Appeared to Me* in 1905, Vivien made the decision to remove all of her works from public bookshelves (Mesch 60). This drastic move indicates a disillusionment with the public's often hostile and simplistic reaction to her work, and one can see the roots of this disillusionment in both editions of *A Woman Appeared to Me.*

The action in the first edition of *A Woman Appeared to Me* is mediated through the varied salons and meeting-places that seem, to the narrator, to be the natural milieu of Vally: both in their artificiality and in their facile approaches to intellectuality. In the scenes set in salons, as Mesch correctly notes, "poems and stories are read aloud and then explained", creating a context in which, unlike Vivien's own published work, the possibility of a "misreading by an outside reader" is made "impossible" (64). Central to these salon scenes, in the first edition, is the androgynous poet San Giovanni, a woman who names herself after the portrait by Leonardo DaVinci. In the context of the novel, San Giovanni represents what Martha Vicinus describes as Vivien's "autobiographical ideal", an a-gendered "alternative to either mannishness or [the] polymorphous pleasure" exemplified by the character of Vally (190-191). The presence of San Giovanni provides ample opportunity for discussion between the poet or "*femme de lettres*" ("woman of letters"), the narrator and Vally concerning the cultural roles and constraints placed upon a public woman writer (Vivien 191).

San Giovanni repeatedly expresses her private conviction that "the woman of letters has infinitely less modesty than the courtesan…[for] one only sells her body to what is, in sum, a restricted number of individuals [while] the other sells her soul, in a print run of thousands" (191). This sense of deep exposure, prompted by the impulse to write (which San Giovanni compares to the impulses of "a drunkard or morphine addict") is compounded by a literary culture that "condemn[s]" women "to celebrat[ing] man" in their writing rather than their own lives and experiences (191-192). In this discursive exposition of the predicament of the woman writer, San Giovanni briefly sketches a scenario that, nearly one hundred years later, Leigh Gilmore would expound upon as the "socially constructed silence of women" in which "the very grounds of identity", as conceived of in a patriarchal ideology, "has [been] denied women" (51). Gilmore's anecdotal example of the story of Hannah Tillich, whose 1974 autobiography was "roundly criticized" because she "wasted the reader's time by telling the story of her own life when she could have written about her husband", is almost identical to San Giovanni's plight as a burgeoning author (51). She is heavily identified with her work and, through that identification, is found essentially wanting by her reading public because she chooses to exalt "the amour of noble harmonies and feminine beauty" that "does not admit any equivocation or sharing" with a male audience (196).

Rather than choosing to individualize this frustration, Vivien contextualizes San Giovanni's distaste with her life as a woman writer within the forms and history of the Greek lesbic poet, Sappho. In an early scene, set in Vally's salon, San Giovanni bemoans the fate of "Psappha", who, through translation, has been transformed into the "colorless appellation of Sappho" (Vivien 134). This mistranslation of a name is then applied,

through San Giovanni's exposition, into a mistranslation of Sappho's identity and sexuality. Referring to Sappho as "the great Unknown and the Great Calumnated", Vally comments bitterly upon the retroactive invention of Sappho's "infatuation with the fop Phaon, the stupidity of which is only equaled by its lack of veracity" (133). This conversation, which pushes back against more revisionist approaches to the seventh-century poet, references the troubled publication and translation history of Sappho. The ancient Greek poet's body of work, which exists primarily in fragments, was made accessible to nineteenth-century audiences through the German translations of Theodor Bergk in 1854 and then, again, by the English translations of Henry Wharton in 1885 (Longworth 364). Significantly, Wharton was the first translator to restore the feminine pronouns of the objects of Sappho's love lyrics, effectively identifying her for the first time to Western audiences as a woman writer who loved other women (364).

Through the revelation of this version of Sappho as a poetess who "lived and sang in a community of women on the island of Lesbos", she became, in the 19th century imagination, a literary representation of "all of the lost women of genius in literary history, especially all the lesbian artists whose work has been destroyed, sanitized, or heterosexualized" (Prins 4, 16; Gubar 46). As Yopie Prins points out, Sappho provided both the perfect model and form for women writers in the mid- to late-1800s because of her fragmented and frequently re-interpreted *oeuvre,* which bears with it the tradition of being repeatedly "transliterated, translated, [and] transformed to produce" multiple signatures and identities by critics and writers alike (12). In this sense, Sappho served as a recognizable representation of the plight of the woman writer through the subjection of her writing to multiple mistranslations. In turn, she also provided an ideal vehicle for self-

identification and posthumous collaboration for would-be women writers. Among Vivien's first published works was a translation of Sappho from the original Greek, interspersing Sappho's fragments with her own poetry.[16] This "'fantastic collaboration'", in the words of Susan Gubar, is only one of many that preceded and succeeded Vivien's encounter with Sappho, becoming one example in a tradition in which an individual female writer was able to "simultaneously hea[l] the anxiety of authorship" and link their self and their writing "to an empowering literary history they could create in their own image" (47). By placing San Giovanni's frustration as a writer in the context and tradition of Sappho, Vivien highlights the connection between the individual modern poet's frustrations and the larger tradition of a necessarily disintegrated identity and fluidity of interpretation in women's writing.

Through these repeated dialogues, Vivien makes a compelling argument for the plight of the woman who publicly writes of her love for other women. San Giovanni's (and, presumably, Vivien's) position is one in which the self is both irrevocably conflated with the individual's work and essentially questioned for its choice of content. The "woman of letters", as San Giovanni phrases it, is subject to "so-called admirations that address the woman rather than the artist" (197). Rachel Mesch has identified this conflict as one essential to the first edition of *A Woman Appeared to Me*: "What Renée and San Giovanni ultimately desire", she writes, "is authority and privacy, that is, the possibility of self-expression without being exposed to misreadings" (66). While Mesch identifies the thematic conflict very aptly, she neglects the many different techniques and artistic

[16] This edition, *Sapho et huit poetesses grecques*, was revised and re-released right before Vivien's death in 1909. Significantly, she broke her previous withdrawal from publication and ordered 2,000 volumes to be circulated in bookstores (Engelking 127).

conceits that Vivien creates and experiments with in order to obfuscate and make abstract the origins of her narrative. Vivien uses artistic and mythological symbols, as well as a nuanced employment of both intertextual and paratextual elements in order to make the text itself so multifaceted that it becomes deliberately difficult for the reader to disentangle the artistry from the identity expressed within the text.

In the 1904 edition, Vivien enfolds each of her characters into a particular set of symbolic values and images that accompany them throughout the text. Vally, for instance, is perpetually associated with "the variable April, the rainbow and the opal", hothouse lilies, and a kind of "lunar" radiance which is communicated through her blue eyes and white-blond hair (128, 130). The narrator describes her as "the marvelous Priestess of a symbol that remained unknown", and throughout the novel narrator is at once her "slave" and her "acolyte" (127, 140). Vivien heaps reference upon reference onto the figure of Vally, referring to her as a "Lorély" and a "perverse Madonna", an object of worship and desire who seems to remain willfully and "chimerically distant" (187, 127). Even when the narrator imagines killing her, it is through the intervening imagery of Ophelia that she imagines Vally "floating on a stagnant marsh[,] Her pale breasts…two nenuphars…The revulsed eyes *looking at me*."[17] As their relationship deteriorates, Vally's status as a near-goddess is only accentuated rather than lessened or grounded in an understanding of her personality. "I'm not making you any reproach, Vally, my Very Blonde and my Beloved", the narrator says when they finally do part:

[17] Interestingly, Natalie Barney's mother, Alice Pike Barney, created a portrait of Ophelia that exactly mirrors this image of Vally in *A Woman Appeared to Me*. According to the Smithsonian Institute, Pike Barney completed the work in 1909, the year of Vivien's death.

> I have immolated my life to you joyfully. You have enabled me to know the incomparable sensuality of sacrifice, the marvelous sweetness of renunciation. I have loved you with a pious amour, as others love their Madonna. In truth, the priests and nuns who repudiate the century in their divine fervor have not known the mystical ecstasy with which I have abandoned everything to follow you. You are the Unforgettable, Vally. (204)

This layering of mysticism and myth over the body and personality of her lover transforms Vally into a symbol and object rather than a living human being. Through the narrator's eyes, her beloved remains an aspect of an all-consuming and all-alienating religion rather than a woman of flesh and blood.

These abstractions into myth accompany all of the characters who inhabit the narrator's world: Dagmar, a woman with whom the narrator becomes involved following her relationship with Vally, is a "hummingbird" to Vally's "wild swan" (216). Her "short curly hair" and "puerile blue" eyes remind the narrator of a "little princess", a "pretty poem in porcelain" whose counterpart, "a delicate [pottery] Saxe shepherdess", is destroyed by the narrator when she learns of Dagmar's engagement to a man (222, 230). Eva[18], the eponymous "*Woman*" in the first edition whose appearance seems to represent a hope for a redemptive and curative love for the narrator, is the "incarnation of Autumn", so-called by the narrator because of her red hair (234-235). She becomes the narrator's "silence" and "solitude", and represents a comfortable love that seems possible because Eva, herself, seems to lack any other desire than to cater to the narrator's needs

[18] While Eva is most commonly interpreted as a stand-in for Renée Vivien's later love, the Baroness Hélène de Zuylen, her red hair might identify her as an intentionally hurtful conflation of Eva Palmer, the occasional lover of Barney, and Zuylen (Souhami 36).

(238). The action of the first novel comes to a head, in fact, in a kind of romantic showdown in which the narrator must choose between "The Best and the Worst", "Vally the Perverse Angel and Eva, the Redemptive Angel" (239). In their final moments in the novel, these two very different women are reduced even further into symbols and images. First, the narrator converts their characters into seasons (the "pale April" of Vally and the autumnal Eva) and then, most abstractly, into colors: "Vally, clad in green, Eva, clad in violet" (248, 250). The final words of the novel are noncommittal at best. "Adieu…and *au revoir*", the narrator pronounces, either dismissing both of her potential lovers or simply refusing to disclose the identity of the spurned lover to her audience.

While this ending would seem to be one that is inconclusive by its very nature, Vivien provides the clue to the narrator's decision in a much earlier passage in *A Woman Appeared to Me,* tucking away the result of the impasse of choice between Vally and Eva in an excerpt of San Giovanni's poetry: "*The color of my days, like an incomplete spectrum, / Darkens gravely from* green *to* violet" (186).[19] This excerpt, which is recited by Vally for the benefit of her guests long before the break between herself and narrator, both presages the advent of Eva in the narrator's life and hints at the narrator's eventual choosing of Eva over Vally in the climactic final scene ("Vally, clad in green, Eva, clad in violet") (250). Throughout the 1904 version of the novel, San Giovanni's poetry interrupts and interprets the action of the narrative, contextualizing the relationships between Vally, the narrator, Eva, and Ione within a language of archetypes and universal themes. In fact, a piece of writing signed by San Giovanni serves as the audience's initiation into novel itself: This short prose poem, laden with axioms and exhortations to

[19] Italics original.

"*Never follow advice…[*for*] Every individual ought to live their personal life and pay dearly for the experience that proves nothing*", and to "*flee the act of initiation as cowardly as pillage, as brutal as rape*", offers keys to what should be the interpretation of Vivien's larger narrative (Vivien 122).[20] In this prefatory piece of writing, attributed to San Giovanni, Ione is indicated as a figure of principal of importance, in spite of her place, within the text, as the narrator's "excessively meditative" and unhealthily withdrawn "elected sister…of childhood" (Vivien 131). "*The dolor of amity*", San Giovanni writes in her preface to the narrator's story, "*is more bitter than the dolor of amour. / Certain people love amity as others love amour. They suffer from by virtue of amity as others do by virtue of amour*" (122). Although the narrator's thoughts are consumed by the failure of her "love for Vally", the initial passages of the novel (written in San Giovanni's voice) indicate the loss of Ione (amity) as more crucial than the loss of Vally (amour) in the narrator's psyche (211, 122).

Vivien's use of San Giovanni and her writing as crucial indicators of the importance of specific themes, characters, and plot points within *A Woman Appeared to Me* is not her only use of intertextual elements to punctuate and make clear the importance of certain settings and characters. In one scene, San Giovanni recites a prose poem that begins, "*I love you because you resemble the autumn and the sunset. I love you because you are ill. I love you because you are going to die*" (152).[21] This poem, which predicts, through its imagery, both the death of Ione ("*I love you because you are going to die*") and the coming of the autumnal Eva into the narrator's life ("*I also love you*

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[20] These epigrams might be a reference to the "*éparpillements*" ("scatterings") or epigrams of Natalie Barney, an edition of which was published the year after Vivien's death (Rodriguez 199).
[21] Italics original.

because you have red hair and green eyes…Your voice is as melancholy as the October breezes") is cited by San Giovanni as being "dictated" to her by "a morbid nocturne by Chopin" (152). Vivien not only references this nocturne through Giovanni's words, but actually cites the specific piece of music ("Chopin. Op. 9.") at the beginning of the chapter. In the 1904 edition, indeed, each chapter is headed with the citation of a piece of music that serves as a thematic indication for the audience. Through these pieces of music, the audience is given further insight into the natures of the characters and the course of the novel's action. A chapter set in Vally's salon, for instance, is sound-tracked with the light, artificial tones of Beethoven's Opus 22, while the death of Ione is appropriately accompanied by Wagner's "The Death of Yseult" and Chopin's "Funeral March" (186, 178, 169). Moreover, in the original text, these pieces of music were portrayed by the graphic depiction of their initial bars drawn at the head of the chapter, thereby adding a visual element to their incorporation into the text (Stableford xx).

Through the invocation of classical music as introduction to each chapter, Vivien not only overlays the action of her text with symbols, mythography, and the writings of the characters themselves, but also through sound and music. The text, in the 1904 edition, incorporates multiple sensory and textual elements in order to both confound the individualities of the characters themselves while also canonizing them in a manufactured cultural context. The characters, their desires, and their disappointments, become a part of a larger and more important cultural narrative concerning same-sex desire and loss. This narrative, artfully drawn together through multiple mediums by Vivien, overwhelms the characters themselves and heightens the action of their lives to that of a carefully rendered and preserved myth.

Considering the crucial role that San Giovanni plays, within the 1904 version, as mediator and predictor of the events in the life of the narrator, her disappearance towards the end of the text elicits a reaction of surprise. Her presence is last indicated in a sequence in which the narrator, enduring a self-induced exile in Toledo following her break with Vally, writes two letters to her poet friend. Although these letters are addressed to San Giovanni, and respond to her questions and thoughts—"*Do you not know, friend, that psychology is mistaken almost as infallibly as medicine*?"[22]—San Giovanni is not given a voice. The narrator's words are all that are available, and the reader is not allowed access to San Giovanni's words for the first time in the narrative (211). Instead, claiming that she "*dare[s] not shake* [San Giovanni's]…*perverse hands*", the narrator bids a permanent "Au Revoir" to the androgynous woman poet (212). San Giovanni never reappears.

In the 1905 version, San Giovanni's role as an indicator and emblem of Vivien's private discomfort with the parallels being drawn between her writing and the events of her personal life becomes far more nuanced. San Giovanni's poems remain in the text, and they serve the same elucidative and predictive functions that are so important to the 1904 edition. In the later version, however, the personage of San Giovanni herself has been abruptly removed from the narrative. She becomes a nameless and faceless "poet", whose voice emerges from a "shadow" in the corner of Vally (now Lorély)'s salon (54). Gone, too, is San Giovanni's extended sermonizing on the life and misunderstood afterlife of Sappho, as well as her bitter lamentations concerning her own life as a woman writer. She exists only through the traces of her writings, and her personality becomes

[22] Italics original.

obliterated by the texts that she has produced. Through her removal of the sections that bemoan the fate of the woman writer to be permanently identified with her work, Vivien simultaneously removes a primary personal identifier from her text. By emphasizing the writing of San Giovanni as important to the text while eliding or obscuring the presence of San Giovanni as a character, Vivien forces her audience to encounter the writing as an artifact without an originator, a feat that, in spite of her best efforts, she was unable to accomplish in her own life and work.

The abstraction through mythography and symbolism that is in evidence in the 1904 edition, furthermore, is only heightened and expanded upon in Vivien's later version of the narrative. Rather than beginning the novel with San Giovanni's words, Vivien chooses instead to preface her novel with the passage from Dante from which she draws the title of her novel: "Over the white veil circled with olive-trees, / A woman appeared to me, in a green mantle / Clad in the color of bright flame" (Vivien 3). The choice to replace San Giovanni's words with those of Dante complicates the intention of the text in several key ways: Rather than invoking Lilith, the "Charmer of the Snakes" whose words to the "ephebe" (as conveyed through the authorial conceit of San Giovanni's pen) introduce the initial text, Vivien instead reinforces the presence of Beatrice (the irrevocably lost "woman" in Dante's *Divine Comedy*) as a thematic element within her text (Vivien 3, 122).[23] This transition from the perverse feminine to what Nicole Albert describes as "the Beloved Woman-Friend", "an abstract identity who took on all aspects of love" typically "marred by failure, deception, and suffering", indicates a

[23] In both versions of the novel, Vivien does include the words, "A woman appeared to me", although the words are attached to a different woman in each version: While Eva is the titular "woman" in the 1904 version, Vally/Lorély assumes the role in the 1905 edition (possible an indication of the brief reunion between Vivien and Barney (189, 7).

shift away from the bitterness of earthly love to the hallowing of the long-lost friend Ione and the peace that she represents for the narrator (67).

Although her character is, for all intents and purposes, eradicated in the 1905 version, San Giovanni is referenced in the appearance of the archetypical Annunciatrix, a figure with a smile "like Leonardo's San Giovanni"[24] who appears to announce the narrator's future meeting with "Lorély", who is, in this version, a "pagan priestess of a resuscitated cult, the priestess of amour without a husband and without a male love, as Psappha once was" (5). While San Giovanni's identity as a woman writer in the previous version gave her the strongest link to Sappho, here Lorély's presence as an initiator of the narrator into "the immortal love of female friends" allows her the hallowed status closest to the Greek poet (5). Therefore, the cultural love of women takes precedence over the anxiety surrounding the lesbian authorial act in the 1905 version. Lorély, as the lover of the narrator, becomes even further abstracted in her identity: She is a "distant sister of Viviane", "the fugitive naiad, the nereid, the oread with the calm hair, the maenad, and the vestal" (20). Lorély, through a love of dressing up that is specific to this version of her character, is given the ability to change shape "by turns, [from] a Byzantine princess, [to] a young English lord,…[to] an Egyptian danced,…[to] a fay clad in iris petals, wearing gems of sparkling dew" (27). While Vally exhibits some tendencies to shift shape and transcend her individual identity through the legitimization of the narrator's adoring gaze, Lorély's ability for magical transformation (as well as her capacity for cruelty) seems to be slightly less grounded in the narrator's view of her and appears to

[24] San Giovanni is referred to, briefly, as a writer in the first few pages but does not appear as a character (1).

exist as an independent quality, making her truly semi-divine in the second version of *A Woman Appeared to Me*.

Ione, too, takes on a far more archetypical role in this version of Vivien's narrative. While the narrator had obliquely named her "the Consoler" in the first edition of the novel, here she is directly associated with the "pensive Madonna, the Madonna who welcomes all prayers", becoming an explicitly Christian counterpart to Lorély's "pagan priestess" (167, 23). Ione's attainment of "the faith", a possession that makes her long for the "death [that] will be the beginning of a paradisal life", sweetens her sudden death in this version of Vivien's novel, and, following her death, the narrator begins to assume some of Ione's ecclesiastical language (62). When speaking, following Ione's death and her break with Lorély, of her newfound love with Eva, the narrator says to the Annunciatrix: "I've loved to the limit of my strength…Later, I was exhausted and I renounced the vain struggle. Like Dante, I've wandered in the stormy night, and I've knocked on the door of the monastery, imploring peace. A nun opened up to me the sanctuary in which my soul was divinely consoled" (110). Eva, in this version, therefore becomes the nun who consoles the wounded and exhausted Dante (the narrator), whose true love, Beatrice (Ione), is gone forever. The final, climactic confrontation between the narrator, Lorély and Eva is translated directly into a choice between pagan licentiousness and Christian purity. The three central women in the narrator's life, Lorély, Ione, and Eva, become mere symbols of a spiritual struggle. By even further removing her narrative from the reaches of individualization and human-ness, Vivien attempts to move her novel irrevocably outside of the reaches of the public's identification of her characters and the situations that inspired her story in the first place. In so doing, her work is translated from

an individual story overlaid with elements of mythography, sound, graphics, and symbolism to a story that is a myth in itself. In this second version of *A Woman Appeared to Me*, then, written at a key point in Vivien's own progressing disillusionment with her identity as a publicly recognized woman writer of same-sex desire, she succeeds in hiding her identity within the confabulations and mythologizations that make up the text itself.

In the 1904 version of *A Woman Appeared to Me*, Vally at one point commiserates with San Giovanni: "I don't admit", she says, "that the personality of the artist should be mingled with the work that she elaborates in suffering. The public espionage organized around the life of a writer, I condemn as the equal of the cowardly profanations of sepulchers that biographies and posthumous publications are" (198). This comparison, here, of posthumous biography to a kind of metaphorical grave-robbery, makes one shudder to think of her possible reactions to what has become her literary legacy. Perhaps due to her ability to express heartbreak and disillusionment so movingly and convincingly in both her prose and poetry, she has attracted a somewhat cult-like body of scholarship, in which the blank spaces of her life are brutally scrutinized for clues that might indicate new readings of her body of work. There is a significant lack of critical distance in much of the scholarship attached to Vivien: While deploring the biographical "confusions between the author and the writing persona" that hound interpretations of Vivien's work, critics freely cite her private letters to her lovers, create psychogeographies out of walking tours of her former home cities, and explicitly conflate her real self with the characters in her work (Lucien 30; Hawthorne 70; Mesch 61). While these approaches are not necessarily atypical when contemplated in the context of literary scholarship, they do tend, in the case of Vivien, to either overtake in importance or

completely ignore the vast body of work that she has left for her audiences to interpret and take inspiration from.

Vivien saw herself primarily as a writer for future generations of women, as evidenced in one of her later poems, "Vous pour qui j'écrivis" ("You For Whom I Wrote"), which is addressed to the "beautiful young women" who will someday fall in love with her verse and, by extension, her self (Goujon 556). In this poem, she imagines the women of the future reading her work and exclaiming, "This woman had an ardor that escapes me… / Would that she were alive! She would have loved me….".[25] The ellipses, in these final stanzas of the poem, deliberately evoke a Sapphic fragment in their style, manifesting this unusual (for Vivien) desire to be conflated with her work in both the poem's formal and thematic elements. In both stylistics and content, this poem serves to re-emphasize the key function and *raison d'être* of Vivien's authorial output—that is to say, her own desire for an audience that might read and enjoy her work in of and for itself. As Engelking notes, Vivien was an author who "tended to literalize and internalize the artistic aesthetic she practiced" (367). In *A Woman Appeared to Me*, Vivien's attempts to elude identifications between herself and the text are intensely justifiable, not least because the text is representative of her in spite of rather than because of its similarities to the events of her life. As an example of her imaginary and holistic envisioning of a lesbian culture, *A Woman Appeared to Me* becomes more indicative, in some ways, of Vivien herself. Through its articulations of her hopes, it serves to obliterate the painful circumstances of her life. It is through the text then, after all, that one may encounter Renée Vivien.

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[25] Translation mine: "Direz-vous: 'Cette femme eut l'ardeur qui me fuit… / Que n'est-elle vivante! Elle m'aurait aimée" (Goujon 556).

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CHAPTER THREE: INDIVIDUALITY AND THE CORPOREAL TEXT IN NATALIE BARNEY'S *THE ONE WHO IS LEGION*

If Renée Vivien's attitude towards her literary career was marked by a significant discomfort with the blatant connections made by her readers between her own identity as a lesbian and her role as writer of lesbian fiction and poetry, Natalie Barney's relationship with her authorial output is much more straightforward. As many critics and scholars have noted, Barney operated under the assumption that "living was the first of all arts", and that the plentiful body of poems, epigrams, plays, long-form fictions, and Sapphic fragments that she produced during her long life were, in a sense, merely a "supplement to her life" rather than an integral part of her existence or identity (Souhami 1; Eichbauer 20). It seems to have become, in fact, a kind of trope of the scholarship that has evolved around Barney's work to begin any serious consideration of her work with an enthusiastic and colorfully drawn portrait of "The Amazon of Letters", the rapacious and adventurous American heiress whose escapades and seductions dominated a large part of the lesbian subculture of Paris from her arrival there in 1900 to her death in 1972 (Orstein and Cleyregue 485). In each of these accounts, which seem at times almost mimetic in their similarities, Barney's sexual appetites are essential to her biographical portrait: "She liked lots of sex, lavish display and theatricality", writes Diane Souhami in the beginning of *Wild Girls*, a book that frames Natalie Barney's life through her romantic encounters with Renée Vivien, Liane de Pougy, and other notable lesbians of the *fin de siècle*: "She inspired and befriended her lovers and broke their hearts. She divided her amours into liaisons, demi-liaisons, and adventures, and called her nature *fidèle/infidèle*" (1). Although she makes a point of the fact that, in spite of her "true" identity as a "serious

writer", Barney is better recognized "for the freedom of her lesbian lifestyle than for her writing", Mary Eichbauer introduces her own examination of Barney's body of work with a description that privileges Barney's social and sexual identities over her clearly evident intellectual capabilities:

> She led the kind of life that is celebrated during its course and later becomes the stuff of legend, its details all but forgotten. Most of her energy was spent living and enjoying her life, and little or none ensuring her place in history. A self-proclaimed pagan, she lived in the moment, without apology for who she was. When life disappointed her, she cut her losses and moved on. When passion moved her, she was brilliant, but deep thinking did not come easily to her. Her judgments on complex issues were sometimes impulsive and, in retrospect, seem ill-considered. Her best thinking occurred in short-lived flashes of insight….She was the mistress and reigning muse of a literary salon that lasted from 1919 to 1968. Near the end of her life, she estimated that she had enjoyed over forty serious sexual liaisons with women, not counting casual encounters. We can only imagine how dazzling she must have been in the flesh. (2)

This passage, which I quote in full simply to illustrate both the subtle denigration of Barney's intellectual ability and the marked valorization of her sexual appetite and social function, is a perfect illustration of some of the common markers that seem to appear and reappear in biographical descriptions of Barney: highlighting her "dazzling" appearance and sexual appeal, Eichbauer places a markedly higher value on Barney's role as "muse" and "mistress", qualifying descriptions of her "brillian[ce]" with remarks on her "impulsive[ness]" and aversion to "deep thinking (2). In the works dedicated to her,

Barney, in the words of Karla Jay, often becomes "Amazonian beyond her wildest dreams", valued more for her reputation as a seductress and *bonne vivante* than for her work as a writer (1).

This treatment, which, perhaps, would not have too unduly disturbed Barney herself, does lend itself toward a body of critical work that often mistakes the ways in which Barney's identity as a self-proclaimed lesbian operated in her personal versus her literary life. In a 2019 article, Deborah Longworth, for instance, states that Renée Vivien was less brave in "directly revealing her lesbianism outside of her writing", while Barney "openly and confidently asserted her homosexuality throughout her life, declaring in *Souvenirs Indiscrets*,… 'I am a lesbian'" (363). This assertion of Longworth's, like many of those made by reviewers and biographers of both Vivien and Barney, makes a comparison of the two writers' attitudes towards their sexualities and gendered identities. In this comparison, Longworth assigns certain values to the writings of the two women that are clearly drawn from assumptions made about their lives. Barney's proud declaration of lesbianism, as cited by Longworth, is an excerpt from a memoir published in 1960. The timing and content of this memoir are not unrelated, as this particular memoir was the first of Natalie Barney's many autobiographical texts to openly address her sexual identity. Moreover, Vivien's decision to publish depictions of love between women under a name very closely associated with herself indicates, if anything, a bolder approach to her public image than Barney's cagey references to women in her own works.

In fact, as Chelsea Ray notes, "while Barney was open about her sexuality" among her friends and in the social scene that she developed around herself in Paris,

"there were certain lines perhaps even she did not wish to cross in print" (35). Barney initially shared Vivien's early visions of "constructing a positive lesbian mythology" through what Longworth describes as a "valorization of the [Sapphic] lesbian lyric"—most specifically through her early works, 1900's *Sonnets des femmes* and 1902's *Cinq petits dialogues grecs*, two collections of poetry that were, both in form and content, heavily influenced by Sappho. However, she became, in her later fiction and nonfiction, much more circumspect in her depiction of same-sex love and non-normative expressions of gender identity (Vicinus 182; Longworth 373). This cloaking of her sexuality in her writing was achieved, in part, by the fact that Barney published the majority of her works in French, a practice that, according to Amy Wells-Lynn, was intended to "avoid censorship" and the notice and/or disapproval of Barney's American family (84). In *The One Who Is Legion* (1930), Barney's only work to be originally written and published in English, she creates a story in which gender fluidity and non-normative desire are central to the work while remaining essentially obscured within a network of layered and multiplying narrative personae, situational abstractions, and supernatural interventions. The novel, due to the late date at which it was written, bears evidence of a turn from decadent to modernist influences, a turn in which neither Renée Vivien, due to her early death, nor Colette, who maintained a remarkably consistent style in spite of her long career, ever took part. The first indication of a modernist bent in terms of stylistics is Barney's choice of narrators: a cadre of spirits, "Death's discards", that decide to inhabit and re-animate the body of a person who has recently killed themself in a Parisian cemetery (Barney 13). In inhabiting the body of "A.D.", the spirits are confronted with the task of "reveng[ing] the suicide, mak[ing] good the failure…tak[ing] over this broken

destiny" and becoming "stronger than life" through the excavation of A.D.'s past and possible reasons for suicide (30).

Like Vivien's *A Woman Appeared to Me*, *The One Who is Legion* has, at its center, a failed love story that has ended in a death. The spirits' gradual discovery of A.D.'s betrayal of the now-dead Stella, and their discovery of Stella's death as motivation for A.D.'s suicide, makes up a large portion of the novel, as well as the eventual need for the "composite or legion" of spirits to be "disbanded" or rather reintegrated into what Eichbauer describes as "the…transcendence" of "androgyny" in the form of "the One" (Barney 160; Eichbauer 20). While Renée Vivien, in her telling and retelling of the tragic union between her narrator and Vally/Lorély in *A Woman Appeared to Me*, relies upon the use of mythical abstraction in order to make her narrative universal, Barney chooses instead to construct a narrating identity that is itself a multiplicity, deliberately "questioning…a stable and unified narrative perspective" (Ray 37). This destabilization of a unified narrator, in turn, removes the markers of gender from the character of A.D. entirely, while creating a narrative in which the individual losses of two individuals (in this case, Stella and A.D.) become trivial and unimportant in the face of the written work that results from their misguided and failed union.

We have seen, in the previous chapters, how Colette and Renée Vivien used self-aware styles of narration and the mythical abstraction of personal narrative as devices through which they could explore their own relationship to their writing and to their hopes for its legacy. While Colette used Claudine's self-aware narration of desire to protest her own role as performer of same-sex desire for her reading public, and Vivien attempted to create a mythologized version of the lesbian love story that might reach out

to future generations, Barney, in *The One Who Is Legion*, uses the multiplicity of the inhabited A.D.'s persona as a metaphor for the fractured persona embodied in the collected life's work of an individual writer. While Vivien and Colette arguably struggled against the positions that they were forced to inhabit by a readership that often conflated their personal lives with their professional writings, Barney seems to have been much less afraid of inviting conjecture concerning the parallels between the events of her life and those depicted in her writings. Her propensity to "live her life as a poem" takes on literary meaning through the artistry with which she encodes the events of her life in texts that were, at least purportedly, meant to be interpreted as fictional (Engelking 66). While Colette and Vivien make use of the parallels with their life in the *Claudine* novels and *A Woman Appeared to Me* as avenues of protest against the erotic exploitation or willful misinterpretation of their readers, Barney essentially complicates the parallels with her documented life in order to trouble the very notion of a coherent or unified narrating persona. She troubles her own instances of self-reference not simply through the introduction of a self-aware and suddenly unwilling narrator (as with Colette) or a willful and increased abstraction within a system of mythological symbols (as with Vivien), but through a systematic and deliberate questioning of a coherent, individualistic narrator altogether.

Through this deliberate disintegration of the embodied self, Barney presents her readers with a radical example of what many theorists have identified as a response, in women's autobiographical writing, to what Sidonie Smith articulates as the patriarchal construction of a "universal subject" in autobiography as a rational consciousness essentially separated from the urges of the body that became a kind of "prerequisite to

entry into the domain of the subject of democratic liberalism" (9). This supposedly integrated and rational construction of the autobiographical self, which (again, according to Smith) traditionally is secured through "normative limits of race, gender, sexuality, and class identifications", is contradicted in Barney's work through the introduction both of a central character whose gender identity and sexuality remain ambiguous at best and a collective of narrating voices that ultimately rejects wholeness in favor of a cooperative multiplicity (10). Barney specifically casts this multiplicity in literary terms, making books, letters, memoirs, and poetry crucial locations of connection and often giving literary interactions primacy over those conducted between living characters. In this way, the "relational self", as outlined by John Paul Eakin as a response to the contaminations of "patriarchal usage" of the universal self, becomes a more workable model in Barney's inclusion of details of her own life (48).

Rather than choosing to protest the possible misinterpretations of herself in her writing, Barney makes that writing, in its very physicality as a collection of volumes, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, a plausible substitution for the unsatisfactory version of personhood represented by her individual body. Vivien, earlier, had attempted something similar in her eradication of the poet San Giovanni from her second edition of *A Woman Appeared to Me*, leaving the poet's words while removing the explanatory presence of the poet herself. In *The One Who is Legion*, Barney moves beyond the idea of the letter, book, poem or epigram serving as a venue for erotic connection (a possibility that Vivien seems to have toyed with in her later poetry), resorting instead to the conclusion that the written word is the only fertile ground available for any sort of authentic connection between individuals. Both through her creation of a definitively fractured authorial

persona and her emphasis upon the importance of the writings of A.D. and Stella, respectively and separately, to understand the cause of A.D.'s suicide, Barney argues for the disintegration of any kind of cohesive and lived self into the written body of work that that self leaves behind. This willful disintegration of the individual personality, moreover, transcends boundaries of gender and sexuality, allowing (in Barney's construction) for the "soul" of the writer to remain, both untethered by societal constraint and purified by virtue of its multiplicity (Barney 160). Through her refusal of the cohesive narrating voice/persona, her deliberate plays upon the tropes of both modernist and decadent literature, and her emphasis upon the importance of the written word as a more true embodiment of the spirit than the actual body, I argue that Barney willfully defies constraints of gender, corporeality, and cohesive individualism in the *One Who is Legion*. In so doing, she moves far beyond both Colette's self-aware and frustrated narrator and Vivien's abstracted mythologies into a depiction of queer desire and love that transcends embodiment altogether. In this sense, Barney goes beyond queering the notion of gender or sexuality to queering the notion of a cohesive personhood itself.

In *The One Who is Legion*, Barney makes use of physical space to both encode and make a pointed reference to the events of her own life. She begins her narrative, for instance, in the former graveyard of Longchamps Abbey in the Bois de Boulogne, "opposite the race-course…where the nuns of Longschamps were buried after the destruction of their abbey" (9). This initial invocation of a real location in Paris, in which both the ancient and the modern and, significantly, the male (the racecourse) and the female (the nuns' final resting place) are intermingled, is but the first of many references to the 1930s Paris that A.D. navigates as the spirits search for the reasons behind A.D.'s

suicide. The physical odyssey that A.D. encompasses a wide variety of locations that include but are not limited to: The Champs Elysées, the Tuileries, the Place de la Concorde, the Trocadéro (very close, interestingly, in proximity to the Cimitière de Passy where both Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney are interred), the Cours la Reine, and the Porte d'Italie (32-35,142). This all-too-real invocation of the living city of Paris as it existed around 1930 grounds Barney's narrative within a recognizable and concrete world.

The home to which the newly-revived and possessed A.D. returns, additionally, is significant in that it mimics that of Barney's famous residence in the Rue Jacob, featuring a bedroom with a "white walls" that "bore a blueish sheen of curtains up to the round ceiling, where storm-blue clouds" looked down on "a large empty bed covered with white furs" (23). Suzanne Rodriguez, and many other autobiographers and critics, have made much of Natalie's "blue-walled bedroom", whose floor bore "a white polar bear skin", a gift from the courtesan Liane de Pougy (176). This slight translation of the physical details of her own bedroom into those of A.D.'s is only further compounded by the description, in the backyard of A.D.'s house, of "a little temple", a "Greek-shaped retreat wedged between the walls of the garden", still holding its own against the background of a distant factory's giant chimney" (176). This description is a clear evocation of the"Temple à l'Amitié", a structure in Barney's back garden built to resemble a "small Doric temple", which, as Wells-Lynn writes, became used in both Barney's work and the work of her friends "to communicate more than just a physical location" but rather as an emblem of "the lived salon experiences and the life of a female Paris through the written page" (Wickes 104, Wells-Lynn 95). Whether these tacit connections between Barney's

own identity and that of the fictional A.D would have been interpreted as such by anyone other than herself and her friends, the subcultural significance of Barney's inclusion of a location like the Temple à l'Amitié as a setting in her novel suggests the invocation of a coterie readership that would, at least at first impression, presume a correlation between the events of Barney's life and those of A.D.'s. Through her use and translation of her own home and the actual settings of Paris, Barney introduces a highly recognizable setting in order to both create both a hyper-realistic context for her fantastical tale and to also raise her audience's expectations for the autobiographical elements that feature within the novel.

Barney upsets any initial expectations of realism, however, through her introduction of a constellation of calculatedly disparate bodies both corporeal and spiritual in nature. This misguiding multiplicity is, of course, first evidenced in the presence of the narrating "Legion" of spirits that inhabit A.D.'s body after death (Barney 160). Not only do the spirits provide a narration that is intentionally de-centered, but their simple existence as ghosts in what seems to be a very real Paris further questions the veracity of the biographical elements that Barney includes throughout the text, further destabilizing the possibility of a coherent biography or biographical narrative. Barney complicates even this somewhat disjointed narrational identity by making the initial narrator a spirit of "Darkness", who contests with a spirit of "Light" to gain entrance into the defunct suicide lying in the graveyard (Barney 14). This Darkness, the spirit of a devoted "master-mistress" couple who were so intertwined within one another that they were transformed, at their death, into a single spirit, joins with the Light and a variety of other spirits, "counsellors, ministers, minstrels, traitors", and their multiplicity takes

occupation of the "fallen rider" constituted by A.D.'s body (11, 13, 15). This collective and chaotic version of identity finds its reflection in the seemingly concrete physical landscapes through which the occupied A.D. moves: A "double silhouette" accompanies the inhabited body as it enters A.D.'s house, creating a "standing and a prostrate shadow" that "sound[s] a single tread on the paved court" (22). In A.D.'s bedroom, a "barometer" hanging on the wall reads "'variable,'" while "a closed black piano [holds] in its polished surface slippery midnight reflections, all blended and blurred like music by the soft pedal" (23). When A.D. looks in the mirror, "a simultaneous succession of reflections" looks back, "[giving] back through endless corridors of crystal, a body…charged with new life" (24). Through this repeated imagery, Barney creates a depiction of an entity in flux moving through a fixed world, defying the concept of an integrated or whole individuality even as she depicts the singularity of A.D.'s body moving through its environment.

Many critics have interpreted this fractal identity as solely troubling the binary of gender, pointing for evidence both to the presence of the Darkness that has served a previous master-mistress couple and to A.D.'s own evident ability to defy categorizations of gender (the spirits, in viewing the body, note that A.D. seems "neither a man nor a woman", and one of A.D.'s former loves addresses A.D. as "Mon Seigneur, Ma Dame" in a letter (15, 47)). In her treatment of *The One Who is Legion,* Elizabeth English acknowledges that "neither sex, gender, or sexuality are predetermined" in the living or post-life embodiment of A.D. but nonetheless continues to refer to A.D. as "she/he" (73). This reference to a gender binary that is troubled by Barney's treatment of A.D. ignores the spirits' linguistic insistence on multiplicity in their narration, as well as their inability

to coalesce into definitive categories. The spirits are in fact troubled by their own lack of integration, commenting, “We’ve met with too many persons and allowed them all to cross and join in us. We shall never get ourselves clear now” (24-25). Barney herself, in her author’s note for the text, identifies an incipient interest “in the idea that I should orchestrate those inner voices which sometimes speak to us in unison, and so compose a novel, not so much with the people about us, as with those within ourselves, for have we not several selves and cannot a story arise from these conflicts and harmonies?” (159). Barney’s explicit fascination with the “several selves” that motivate what is perceived as the individual takes the question outside of any bounds of gendered identity into a discussion and treatment of identity itself. The spirits who inhabit A.D.’s body are not so much troubling the binary of gender in their inability to coalesce as they are upsetting the concept of a coherent identity that could even begin to lend itself to a specific gender or sexuality.

Barney’s insistent fracturing of visual and narrational coherence is further communicated through the sensational impressions of the spirits themselves, who not only find themselves incapable of forming into a unified entity but also seem to feel an open, somatic empathy with the world around them. This empathy seems to transcend the divides of individual embodiment. As they propel the body of A.D. through Paris, the spirits can feel the thoughts and emotions of the people who pass, their impressionistic registering of both pain and joy becoming, at times, sensorily overwhelming. They are able to feel the pain of “a rope-raw limping mule” and the “sore eyes” of an old woman, even piercing through the “coffin” and “ceremonious clothes” of a passing hearse to view and commune with “the bruised decomposition of the flesh,… the architectural, sexless

skeleton" (35, 36). This ability to move beyond physical boundaries and openly commune with the world around them defines the spirits as, in their own words, "a collective emotion", able to perceive and feel the world as if there were no boundaries between their own corporeality and that of their surrounding environs (38). Moreover, this empathy expresses itself through sensory terms, the seemingly incorporeal spirits feeling and sympathizing with the bodily pain of the mule and the old woman.

Barney, it is clear, intends to make this sense of radical empathy a metaphor for the condition and experiences of the writing consciousness: "Participating too greatly in others", the spirits, at one point, comment, "we felt their sensations instead of our own. So aware were we of external life that we seemed to lose sight of our own life—just as we see others and are to ourselves but the invisible centers of this observation" (85-86). The greatest evidence of this state disorganization of the self as a metaphor for the act of writing exists in the series of epigram-like statements that Barney allows to seep into the text as a recording of the spirits' impressions as they move A.D.'s body through the city and surrounding countryside. These short, enclosed statements, some obvious in their derivation and some more obscure, cover a range of topics both relevant to the terrain that A.D. is trekking and to the thematic questions of the work itself: "Better to be king of cabbages; vegetables smell less than corpses?...Cat's tails; lightning rods…A wish? A limitation…Angels are hermaphrodites, self-sufficient. No marrying in heaven…Two needed—No one entirely a woman or a man?" (37-38). The disjointed nature of these epigrams clearly and intentionally mimic Barney's previously published "scatterings",[26]

[26] An excerpt from Barney's 1910 *Scatterings,* as translated by George Wickes, provides a prime example of her own Wildean epigrams: "'To have or not to have, which is worse?...Forever is too long…Eros is the youngest of the gods. He is also the most tired'" (Wickes 114).

tying the lack of identity experienced by the spirits to that experienced by a writer and professional "observer", who forgoes their own identity in the observation of others (86).

While these epigrammatic statements, which appear at intervals throughout Barney's novel, are clearly a reference to her own work as a writer, their content is deliberately focused, often repetitively so, on the possibility of the integration of the self into a single and determined unit. The series of epigrams quoted above ends in a relatively coherent series, coalescing into something resembling a poem:

> I no longer see, hear, feel or breathe according to your laws.
>
> Nor love you, Psyche, half-caught in the flesh.
>
> Yet I would thank you that you did not detain me,
>
> Nor feed me, nor drug me to sleep in your body.
>
> Nor bury me in living.
>
> Your servitudes have freed me.
>
> Disunited and seeking completion.
>
> Without you I am that other self
>
> That has been denied burial in you,—
>
> That One to Oneness returning." (38)

This half-poem, emerging from a wilderness of the disjointed thoughts and impressions of the spirits, makes reference to the myth of Eros and Psyche in order to emphasize a pronounced lack of desire for the "burial" of the individual self in the love of another person (38). The spirits speak from a "disunited" position; they seek "completion" through a return to singularity ("That One to Oneness returning") even as they acknowledge the freedom granted them through their pronounced incompleteness (38).

This somewhat ambivalent approach to the question of singularity/multiplicity, as voiced by the spirits, introduces the possibility of an integrated soul while rejecting the finding of a complete identity in the "body" or "flesh" of another person (38).

Throughout the novel, this search of the spirits for an integrated individuality is repeatedly punctuated by an insistence that such an individuality can never be achieved through the satisfaction of an individual love affair. The spirits' search for the reasons behind A.D.'s suicide, for instance, are temporarily upset by the appearance of the Glow-woman, a past lover with whom A.D. (as guided by the spirits) has a brief and highly unsatisfactory affair. In the context of this affair, which is punctuated by the spirits' "recurring resentment" of the Glow-woman, which they interpret as the residue of "A.D.'s life before ours with this woman", the Glow-woman comes to represent both the impulse towards a burying of one's self in another and the ultimate impossibility of such a connection (76). In a scene in which A.D. and the Glow-woman have sex, the spirits note the visual impression of the shadows of the two bodies, "bedded on the wall", "an audacious figure—a pornographic imitation of love-making" (81). "Were we they", the spirits wonder, "were they we? Where joined, where separate?" (81). This seeming communion of individuals through sex, however, is revealed (post-orgasm) to be an insufficient integration of selves: "The love-rapture, with its fall into and rise from the physical, its humiliating sequence, seemed an inadequate substitute for some supreme communion confiscated and sought for through the limited vibrations of flesh" (82). Both the evidence of a past affair between the Glow-woman and A.D. and the spirits' growing disillusionment with the possibility of finding wholeness in the Glow-woman's

"indefinite being" becomes, in itself, a clue to the sequence of events that caused A.D.'s despair and eventual suicide (76).

The true narrative, however, of A.D.'s life and death, as well as the possibility of wholeness, is not in the end found in the "sad repetition of conjugal and other loves" enjoyed by the Glow-woman and her ilk, Barney makes clear, but in the congress provided through the medium of the written word (66). From the beginning of the spirits' search for the causes of A.D.'s suicide, their most ample resources are provided through a mysterious book they find in the pagan temple in the back yard of A.D.'s home: This book, titled "The Love-Lives of A.D.", is neither "memoir" nor "will", but rather a collection of "traces of the human adventure undergone by [A.D.],—hardly a satisfactory document", the spirits note, "no names, no dates, no anecdotes" (27). The document itself, bound in what at first appears to be "vellum", is "comprised" of "hymns, quotations", with "poems" that "[throw] out their antennae for individual comprehension" (29). The seeming incompleteness of this document, however, is deemed by the spirits to be "as authentic, as satisfactory as the simple narration of an experience" because it reveals "some personally captured truth" that is, through the very fracturing of its coherence, more emotionally real than a more traditional narration of a life (28). The authenticity of the volume is reified, not through the coherence of the words left on the page, but on the communion achieved between the dead writer and the readers who now interpret the remnant fragments left behind. In this first of many such instances, Barney creates a relationship between writer and reader in which the incoherence of the individual personality is overcome both through the emotional reality of the writer's work and the interpretation of that emotional charge through the presence of a reader. Thus, the

written text, while remaining on its own insufficient, becomes a viable carrier for the narrative and reality of a life lived through the mediating interpretation of a sympathetic reader in a collaborative act that makes both reader and writer, in some way, more whole than they were before.

The record of A.D.'s loves becomes physically representative of A.D. as well, as the spirits discover that what they perceived as vellum is in fact the skin of a "human breast", a revelation compounded by the discovery, upon A.D.'s body, of "two blade-smooth scars across the chest", evidence that "the *peau de chagrin* binding had been taken from our [A.D.'s] own flesh" (29, 41). This translation of bodily and emotional pain into the written experience (physicalized, here, in the binding of A.D.'s fragmented record of repeated seductions and betrayals in actual human flesh) is repeated throughout the novel in the spirits' examinations of the papers and effects that populate A.D.'s deserted home. In an examination of A.D.'s library, for instance, the spirits observe that A.D. has arranged the books to imitate the body, with "books of thought—inspired thought" placed "beyond the ego" and over the head, followed by "books of cold observation" at head-height, "novels, treating of the affairs of the heart, at the place of the heart", "erotic anthologies" at groin level, and so on (94). The arrangement of A.D.'s library to evoke the human body once again complicates the boundaries between the individual body and the thoughts and writings that, in the words of the spirits, "nourish and guide" that body (29).

Not only do the books take on, in this context, aspects of the body, as they are created by "those who wrote with their soul, their bile,…their blood, or the blood of others", but they symbolically take on the role of "parents" and "produc[ers]" to the

individual identity: “Were not these books”, the spirits observe, “the imposed ancestors of A.D.’s mind?” (94-95). This fracturing of the corporeal self into the physical form of books and the written word, the “printed matter contained within the measurements of the body”, is repeated throughout the spirits’ quest for the truth of A.D.’s life (95). In this way, as through the very real fracturing of the identities of the spirits inhabiting A.D.’s body, individuality itself is complicated through the intrusion of the unsatisfying, essentially disparate, but emotionally true medium of the physically written word.

This fracturing of A.D.’s self, both through the spiritual intervention of the various inhabiting Lightnesses and Darknesses that take over following A.D.’s death and the physical record of A.D.’s life in the form of the physical books and papers that are found in A.D.’s former home, seems to defy both the possibility of individual integration (“the one to oneness returning”) and the possibility of finding completion in another person (101). Barney does, however, introduce the possibility of completion through the communion made possibly by the written word itself. As the spirits pore over “The Love-Lives of A.D.”, they find that their ability to comprehend the text stems from an emotional participation in A.D.’s recordings: “We read our way through an anguish distinct as a cry”, they comment, while “Another paragraph so suited our present state that we continued the reading of it within ourselves” (29). This act of reading as a meeting between the emotions of the author and the reader provides an opportunity for connection that is missed in the spirits’/A.D.’s interactions with the Glow-Woman.

Significantly, the existence of Stella, the “love of [A.D.’s] life” whose death is eventually revealed to be the motivation for A.D.’s suicide, is first revealed through the written word (113). The spirits, in examining A.D.’s correspondence, discover a poem

written by A.D. that once again speaks to the dubious possibility of the individual self being enveloped in a relationship with another person: “Love, take me back to you and make me whole, / Who am divided and in unbelief, / An infidel in thought and word and grief, / A double heart and a promiscuous soul!” (42). These anguished words, which betray both a desire for completion in another and the impossibility of that completion due to a “promiscuous soul”, is “answer[ed]”, in the reading of the spirits, in the inscription of a fan found on the outside steps of A.D.’s house: “You had the ivory of my life to carve” (44). The coupling of the “prayer” of A.D.’s poem and the “reproach” of the inscription on the fan, which the spirits discover belongs to “S. de la C.D.” or Stella Duthiers, tells the story of betrayal and failed fidelity that caused both Stella’s eventual death and A.D.’s resulting attempt at suicide (44). It requires the intervening readership of the spirits, however, to bring together the two texts, which are, in terms of modality and physical location, entirely disparate and unable to reach one another. Therefore, the reading presence of the spirits serves as a uniting and almost curative force in its capacity to bring together texts intended to existence in coincidence.

The tale of Stella and A.D., which is fleshed out through their correspondence (as read by the spirits), is revealed to be both the original sin of A.D.’s suicide and the possible source of redemption for the spirits, who are still attempting to achieve integration through the ascendance of “the lost leader”, the “one” obscured by their legion (101). When Stella’s husband, Duthiers, who is now smitten with the Glow-Woman, “bequeath[es] the past” in the form of “Stella’s belongings at the time of her death, her apartment full of relics and memories” in exchange for a chance at a dalliance with the object of his desire, he demonstrates his sincerity of the offer through the

inclusion of a letter written from Stella to A.D. at the beginning of their affair (110). This letter serves, to the spirits, as a kind of resurrection of Stella herself: “So in the beginning and at last She had come to claim us”, the spirits record, “Had She not come back to us Herself, fan in hand, and now one could shut Her out” (111). The letter serves as a communication between the resurrected A.D. and the resurrected Stella, providing the spirits with a solution to the mystery of A.D.’s death.

Upon gaining access, via Duthiers, to Stella’s final apartment in “an abbey built right against [an] old church” in the outskirts of Paris, the spirits, “so starved for her that [they] catch at anything” for sustenance, find at first “no communication” of the love story that existed between Stella and A.D. in the bare environs of the room (144). Eventually, as in the spirits’ first explorations of A.D.’s home, the physical surroundings themselves create a “first impression of [the] intimacy” that has existed between Stella and A.D.: “The house with a temple”, the spirits comment, “and this apartment set against a church, with voices echoing a whisper of sacred music, had their analogies” (145). The posthumous intimacy accomplished in this scene is read by Elizabeth English as an example of “spectral lesbianism”, in which A.D. and Stella “form a utopic transcendental union” purer than anything that they might have achieved while alive (69). One can find evidence for English’s claims in Barney’s treatment of A.D.’s love for Stella, who, in the spirits’ narration, becomes “remote enough for love” through her death (111). English elides the fact, however, that the accomplishment of this once-impossible love through posthumous intimacy is finally and irrevocably actualized through the spirits’ reading of Stella’s letters. “There upon the floor lay, thick as autumn leaves, the trophies, the conquests of our sorrow”, the spirits narrate, “As we bowed down to gather

them together, a passage in the uppermost was as mind transference: ‘For surely to haunt is more than to possess!” (146). Through the reading of Stella’s letters, the spirits (and A.D.) are able to fully commune with the dead woman, achieving a purity of relationship that eluded the couple in life: “The letters pieced out our whole spent liaison, and sometimes they recalled something of it, and sometimes we; and we were moved together and the white wings trembled in our hands as their soared out of them,…Our thoughts went from each confessional: from the letters to the book” (148).

As readers, the spirits become conduits for a true union between A.D. and Stella that is “absolved and blessed” by the mutuality of their confessional accounts (148). It is not simply, as English seems to suggest, that death makes possible a perfect meeting of the two souls. Rather, the written accounts left behind by both Stella and A.D. work together to “[go] farther than other couples in the surrender to desires that could not be satiated by any bodily gift”, creating a meeting of the souls with the spirits themselves acting as intercessors between the two dead lovers (148). In the final moments of this scene, the love between A.D. and Stella effloresces to the point that, in the spirits’ words, “Our heart caught fire and burned as a sacred lamp within us, and the light shone through us that it might guide us to her. And our lover’s arms stretched out to her, wider than the crucified arms of Christ: and we were joined together, and two lovers became one angel” (149). This final transcendence, in which bodily constraints are made entirely immaterial, the multiple voices of the spirits work to combine the varied and incomplete bodies of work left by A.D. and Stella into a single and holistic form. It is only at this moment that “an explosion of sound, a roaring, a blotting of notes, a single blast” announces the

assertion of the One, who, declaring “I am I”, is able to reclaim dominance over the cacophony of spirits (150).

This dramatic resumption of an integrated self, the One, through the spirits’ connection of the written words of A.D. and Stella, is followed by a somewhat anticlimactic series of events that ties up Barney’s novel: Having worked so hard to regain integration, the spirits, in their several capacities and forms, capriciously attempt to argue with the One, making their cases for remaining in control of A.D.’s body. Having failed this, they determine to take A.D.’s body to Stella’s grave and allow it to be “cured of convalescence” and rest next to the remains of A.D.’s beloved (158). The reassertion of the One in the final moments of the novel, however, allows for this curative restoration of death to take place, and the intermingling of the souls of A.D. and Stella remains in place both through the reunion of their corporeal and their written bodies. Once again, Barney combines the ideas of the physical and the written in her final pages of the novel, making the communion of A.D.’s words with those of Stella’s the condition for their bodies to rest in peace together. Barney makes the conversation between the written accounts of Stella’s and A.D.’s relationship the true union of their souls, only bookended by the intermingling of their bodies in death. Rather than, in the end, focusing either on the corporeal or spiritual combination of the two lovers, Barney instead makes her focus the interplay of their works as writers. Through this accentuation on the letters and fragmented accounts left behind by the two lovers, the acts of writing and reading overcome the individual and collective impulses of the body. The physical document provided through books, letters, correspondence, and poetry becomes, for Barney, the

transcendent quality of the individual life, revealing more in its intertextual capability than either the felt soul or the living body can possibly contain.

Writing of her relationship with Renée Vivien in her autobiographical work *Adventures of the Mind*, Natalie Barney observed that "the love duet is an invention of opera; in real love, one only sings alone or one after the other" (187). As many have observed, there are many similarities between *A Woman Appeared to Me*, *The One Who is Legion*, and the conclusion of Barney's own affair with Vivien. Like Barney and Vivien, A.D. only learns of Stella's death when she goes to pay a visit and is informed, "*Madame vient de mourir*" ("Madame has just died") (108). Like Vivien, Stella is recorded as converting to Catholicism in the final moments of her life (145). A line from Vivien's poetry, "Let the dead bury their dead", becomes a kind of mantra throughout *The One Who is Legion* and is in fact actualized in the form of the resurrected A.D. attempting to appease and resolve the betrayal of Stella and the guilt surrounding her death (110). These well-known and documented references to the failed love affair between Vivien and Barney, which had irrevocably concluded with the death of Vivien some twenty-one years before the writing of *The One Who Is Legion*, causes one to wonder if the work itself is not an attempt to create a conversion of written work similar to that accomplished by A.D. and Stella. Barney's emphasis upon the possibility of the intermingling of written work, and her clear sense that such an intermingling is the only way that one that might approach a true union between two people, frames this work as a possible attempt to answer Vivien's version of their love affair in *A Woman Appeared to Me*. While Vivien struggled against the burden placed upon her by the presence of clearly autobiographical elements in her work, Barney frames the written word and the physical

work that contains it as the purest form of personhood, allowing the body of work to replace the body of the individual entirely. Through this completely de-corporealized approach to personhood, one that allows for what Barney clearly sees as the essential purity of multiplicity, gender and sexuality are completely eradicated and replaced by the recorded emotional experience. This experience, which does not need to be linear or even coherent in its recording, becomes a surrogate for the personality that created it. Therefore, Barney, in a sense, joins Vivien in her desire for a body of work that serves as a connection between herself and other people. A possible distinction between the two, however, is that Barney desires her writing to be read while she is still alive. Rather than shying from the connections made between herself and her work, she laments (via the tragic scenario of A.D. and Stella) that such true connection is so often achieved only after death. Barney's view of her work as an immediate social and emotional conduit between herself and others defies boundaries of gender, sexuality, corporeality, life, and death, insisting upon a multiplicity of experience that becomes genuine through its very inclusivity. In this way, Barney abandons questions of gender and sexuality altogether in *The One Who is Legion*, queering the very notion of individuality in favor of the multivalent possibilities provided through the medium of the written word.

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