

Renée Vivien's Sapphic Legacy: Remembering the "House of Muses"

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ABSTRACT

Sappho represents both a powerful female precursor and an example of how women's writing has been censored. She nevertheless felt certain that "Someone in the future will remember us." Renée Vivien (1877-1909), lesbian poet and translator of Sappho, felt the full impact of this mixed sapphic legacy and, like her principal muse, she became more and more concerned about her future readers to whom she left her own mixed legacy. Despite the tragic aspects of her life, Vivien's sapphic legacy to modern-day readers is positive since it emphasizes a woman-centred lyric tradition that constitutes the "House of Muses."

RÉSUMÉ

Sappho représente à la fois un précurseur féminin puissant et un exemple de la censure levée contre l'écriture des femmes. Cependant, elle était certaine que «Quelqu'un se souviendra de nous dans l'avenir». Renée Vivien (1877-1909), poète lesbienne et traductrice de Sappho, a ressenti la pleine force de ce legs mixte sapphique et, comme sa Muse principale, elle s'occupait de plus en plus de ses lectrices et de ses lecteurs futurs auxquels elle a laissé, elle aussi, un legs mixte à assortir. Malgré les aspects tragiques de sa vie, le legs sapphique de Vivien aux lectrices et aux lecteurs d'aujourd'hui est plutôt positif puisqu'il fait ressortir une tradition lyrique gynocentrique qui constitue «La Maison des Muses».

“SOMEONE, I BELIEVE, WILL REMEMBER us in the future.” This verse, written by Sappho in the sixth century B.C., is among the few fragments that have survived from the nine books of divine verse she is known to have written. While Sappho correctly predicted the immortality of her work, she could not have guessed how centuries of repression, combined with neglect, would leave it in tattered bits for “someone” to assemble.¹ The bits and pieces of her life and work have been woven into numerous and often contradictory sapphic fictions — a mixed legacy for women writers for whom her example is both empowering and disquieting. On the one hand, Sappho is what Susan Gubar

calls a “fantasy precursor” par excellence. Since so little is actually known about her, she can function as a blank page on which women writers are free to project a powerful literary foremother and trace the beginnings of a female literary tradition.² On the other hand, Gubar reminds us that Sappho represents “all the women of genius in literary history, especially all the lesbian artists whose work has been destroyed, sanitized, or heterosexualized,” — deliberately censored or conveniently misread when their work (and sexual orientation) challenged the dominant ideology (46).

Perhaps no one has felt the impact of Sappho's mixed legacy more strongly than the

lesbian poet and translator of Sappho's poems, Renée Vivien (1877-1909). An Anglo-American whose real name was Pauline Tarn, Vivien was independently wealthy; therefore, she was free to escape, by going to Paris, her family and the restrictions of her Victorian upbringing. There she pursued her studies of Greek and wrote lesbian poetry in French.³ A Greek scholar, lesbian and poet, Vivien seemed ideally suited for re-membering Sappho's fragmented verses which she translated into French and then elaborated, weaving Sappho's words almost obsessively into the fabric of her own poems. Her original poetry is so saturated with sapphism that it is often difficult to know where Sappho ends and Vivien begins. She was so close to her principal muse that André Billy called her "Sappho 1900, Sappho 100%."⁴ It was not a particularly accurate description of Vivien who saw herself more as one of Sappho's faithful disciples than a fin-de-siècle incarnation of the tenth muse, but his label does point to the ways she would subsequently be read. Literary history makes it all too clear; a fantasy collaboration with Sappho may empower the woman writer, but such a close identification might also mean sharing her legacy as "la grande Méconnue et la grande Calomniée" (38) as Vivien put it in her autobiographical novel, *Une Femme m'apparut*.⁵

Vivien, for her part, understood this better than most of her idealistic contemporaries. Ironically, while her acute awareness of how male perspectives dominated and shaped Sappho's place in literary tradition may have inspired her efforts to recuperate Sappho as a lesbian poet, it also fuelled her fears for the future of her own work. She devoted an enormous amount of creative energy to clearing up the core of traditional misunderstandings about Sappho — namely, her sexual orientation — by generating and promoting her own "fiction"

of a Sappho who wrote unambiguously for and about women. Her recuperation of Sappho extends to all the genres she practised, from her translations and expansions of Sappho's fragments, to her novel and numerous original poems. In "Psappha Revit," the poem that is considered Vivien's creed of sapphic love, she specifies that, as a modern-day follower of Sappho, her role is to conserve the rites of Lesbos.⁶ The prefix "re-" occurs frequently in Vivien's poems about Sappho because she imagines them as revival and continuation of Sappho's ideal of love poetry as it was practised on Lesbos. "Douceur de mes chants" (*Évocations*, OPC 91) and "En Débarquant à Mytilène" (*À l'heure*, OPC 268), for example, both invite her readers on a voyage to eternal Lesbos "à travers les siècles disparates" where Sappho neither forgets nor is forgotten (268). In the first, Vivien imagines herself greeted by the silent ghost of Sappho whose muteness requires someone to speak in her place. This is confirmed in the final verses: "Et nous redirons à la terre enivrée / L'hymne de Lesbos" (91). In the second poem, the poet talks of rediscovering and recovering Mytilene, of making it "l'autel aujourd'hui des ivresses d'hier." The emphasis is on continuity, connection and community, and it is in this spirit that Vivien consistently links her revival of Sappho's cult to the line "Someone, I believe, will remember us in the future." If Vivien returned to these words again and again, it was as if, by so closely collaborating with her ancient Greek mentor, she could become one of "us" and thus ensure that her own work would be remembered by future readers.

That Vivien wanted her poems to be read by future generations is beyond question when we examine the relationship that she spells out with her readers in several key poems as well as the development of her career. Her biographer Jean-Paul Goujon believes that the main

motivation for Vivien's prolific literary output — over 20 volumes of poetry, short stories, prose poems and one novel in 10 years — was a desire to leave an oeuvre for the future (Preface OPC, 10). As one of the first modern women poets to write openly about love between women, Vivien was naturally concerned about how posterity would treat her work, especially when she began seeing a definite bias against her work then. A 1908 anthology of French poetry, for example, contained none of Vivien's poems and, according to Paul Lorenz, her works were also banned from the afternoon poetry readings presented by the actors of the Comédie française. Vivien's earlier optimism, connected to the most prolific period of her career when she was closest to Sappho, was eventually overshadowed by growing fears and mistrust of the reading public, and by morbid and self-destructive tendencies which seem to have been part of Vivien's psychic make up. Sappho remained central to Vivien's poetic vision until 1907; her disappearance from Vivien's works coincides with a marked decline in the quality of her poems which deteriorated along with her health until, in 1909, at the age of thirty-two, Renée Vivien died from pneumonia, complicated by the damage she had wreaked on her body through alcoholism and anorexia.

Significantly, the last project Vivien undertook before her death was a revised edition of her French translations from the Greek which she combined into a single abridged volume and published anonymously as *Sappho et huit poétesses grecques*. As was Vivien's usual practice, this volume was printed at her own expense, but she made the surprising request of ordering 2,000 copies to be sold in public bookstores — surprising since she had withdrawn all her own books from circulation during this same period. Yet, while she worked to preserve Sappho for future readers, despite her weakened physical condition, the

fate of her own work occupied her to the point that she also began preparing a new edition of her complete works of poetry. In a revealing letter to her editor written when she was severely ill, Vivien confuses the two projects, suggesting how closely their fates were intertwined in her mind (see *Tes blessures* 413). Equally telling is Vivien's conversion to Catholicism in the final days before her death. It seems she looked to the Christian God as well as her pagan muse Sappho in a last desperate attempt to reflect the finality of death, for both held out the promise of an immortality of sorts.

So overwhelming were Vivien's fears for the future of her work that one can easily imagine her dying with this question on her lips: "How will I be remembered?" Looking at the reception of Vivien's work both in the U.S. and in France, we can see that her reputation is shaping up along lines similar to her ancient model and mentor. Like Sappho, she has left her readers a mixed legacy to sort out, and the widely divergent interpretations of her work are also reminiscent of Sappho's place in literary history. Take, for example, Salomon Reinach, an early Vivien admirer whom Natalie Barney called her "posthumous lover." Reinach took it upon himself to collect many of Vivien's personal papers which he sealed in the Bibliothèque Nationale until the year 2000. By thus protecting her reputation, he felt he was working in Vivien's best interest. As he explained in a letter to Natalie Barney: "J'ai horreur de tout ce qui peut ressembler à une biographie de Renée Vivien. On a ses vers divins, cela suffit."⁷

The literary critic Yves-Gérard Le Dantec is another of Vivien's male admirers who also attempted to rescue her from damnation. In his book, *Renée Vivien: femme damnée, femme sauvée* (1930), Le Dantec sidesteps the question of Vivien's sexuality by declaring that "Je

ne perdrai ni mon temps, ni celui du lecteur à me demander si le saphisme fut ou non un élément décisif de son talent ou de son originalité" (18).⁸ He does admit, however, that Vivien's readers will find themselves in the "delicate situation" of deciding to what degree they can ignore her "abnormality" (211), and suggests that the obscurity of this gifted poet is due to her "perversions." Le Dantec's title offers a partial solution to this dilemma as he devotes his final chapter to supporting the sincerity of Vivien's death bed conversion to Catholicism: "L'hellénisme saphique lui fut un étrange poison que ses veines ne rejetèrent ... qu'à la dernière minute" (215).

The Reinachs and Le Dantecs of this world have tried to shape the course of literary history by repressing or reshaping information about "Sappho 1900" in ways consistent with the censoring and misreading of women poets since Sappho. Male readers, however, are not the only culprits; contemporary feminist writers have also contributed to the Vivien legend by creating what Elaine Marks calls "Imaginary Renée Vivien."⁹ Even earlier, Vivien's friend and neighbour, Colette, helped perpetuate the Vivien legend by devoting a chapter to her in *Le Pur et l'impur* (originally published as *Ces plaisirs...* in 1932). Colette's account, which constitutes the most famous portrait of the poet by a contemporary, capitalizes on chilling descriptions of the stifling decadent interior of Vivien's apartment, her odd (and self-destructive) eating habits, her collection of Buddah statues and pet frogs. These details are fascinating, but Colette devotes no space to considering Vivien as a writer. According to Colette's account, Vivien tried to mask her literary aspirations behind a titillating and mysterious lifestyle, hiding her poems in baskets of fruit to offer them as gifts, and shoving her poems in progress under a cushion if anyone entered the room while she was writing.

Contemporary readers who hold up Vivien as a positive lesbian role model are also guilty of misreading or selective reading, because they choose to ignore those negative aspects of Vivien's life and work which do not fit into their paradigm of "Sappho 1900," or what Elaine Marks identifies as the "metaphysical anguish and the enigma of sexual identity" at the thematic core of Vivien's work (178). Renée Vivien's woman-centred sapphic vision and celebration of women loving women appalled many of her earlier readers, but it enthralled feminists today who are disturbed and confused by the often misogynistic decadent aesthetic and fascination with death that pervades much of her writing. It is difficult to ignore Vivien's apparent hate for her body, her frigidity, jealousy, extreme paranoia and rejection of women like Barney who offered her valuable support and, most of all, her tragic end. These are some of the elements that do not fit popular fantasies of Paris-Lesbos, imagined by some as the ideal support group for creative lesbians. The incomplete record of Vivien's life only makes matters worse, and even those contemporaries who knew and wrote about her, such as Colette and Natalie Barney, often present conflicting pictures.¹⁰ She has been 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 more than 80 years since her death, some of Vivien's worst fears have been realized as her readers create various fictions of "Sappho 1900," or "Imaginary Renée Vivien," to suit their own ideological agendas. In short, Vivien is becoming more like Sappho all the time!

Much modern-day mythologizing about Renée Vivien revolves around her death and the theme of death in her poetry, both of which are written about nearly as often as her

sapphism. It is as if her readers cannot help but wonder about the reasons Vivien allowed herself to die so young. We are seduced by her darker side in perhaps much the same way she was seduced by the decadent aesthetic of writers like Swinburne and Baudelaire. As Colette's portrait of her reveals, Vivien encouraged that identification, dramatically posing, for example, as Lady Jane Grey in a tableau-vivant she created of Grey's execution (with Colette's lover Missy in the role of the executioner).

Some critics have suggested that Sappho's suicidal leap from the Leucadian cliff, a motif that reoccurs in Vivien's poetry, prefigures her own death. Still others find in her poetry "life-denying" or negative images of the (often lesbian) femme fatale associated with Baudelaire, the French Symbolists, and Decadence.¹¹ Cassandra Laity, for example, speaks of the "dark" side of Decadence that Vivien allowed to rule her imagination;¹² Susan Gubar identifies Vivien's Sappho with sadistic images of the lesbian femme fatale which Vivien internalized, "tapping the energy of the decadents' alienated lesbian," in her art, even while suffering "the consequences of such internalization" in her life ("Sapphistries" 49). Gubar examines the link between Sappho and suicide to suggest that those, like Vivien, who collaborate with her "may be destined to associate the grace and daring of her art with the anguish of a fated, if not fatal, eroticism" (61). For Lillian Faderman, Vivien internalized decadence to the point that her death paralleled the suicide of Swinburne's decadent heroine, Lesbia Brandon.¹³ Lawrence Lipking places Vivien in the long tradition of abandoned women, and reads her translation of Sappho's second ode as the poet forever separated from her beloved by death.¹⁴ Shari Benstock analyses Vivien's "death wish" which she relates to Vivien's loss of her father at age 9 and to

Barney's infidelities, arguing that Vivien's "artistic genius rested in morbid desires for and fears of death."¹⁵

While each reader, including this one, is in a sense creating her own imaginary Renée Vivien, I am troubled by how closely Vivien's life, death and personal failures have influenced the interpretation of her work. Just as Sappho's suicidal leap and the motivation for that leap — whether it actually happened or not — become insignificant in the face of a poetic oeuvre whose passionate lyricism has endured for centuries, Vivien's work is more than the sum of her life and death. My initial reaction to Vivien's work was influenced by the tragic aspects of her life which led me to perceive her sapphic vision as a failure.¹⁶ I eventually concluded, however, that her service to a sapphic literary tradition bore fruit after all, for would we be discussing her work at this moment if she had failed? It is certainly true that she ended her life tragically, but — and this is an important "but" — as Benstock has also noted, Vivien's poetic effort was successful although her personal effort was not (*Left Bank* 287). This, too, was Natalie Barney's message to Vivien's readers when, during a poetry reading she had organized to commemorate her friend, she reminded the audience: "Mais l'oeuvre de ta vie est là pour te venger."¹⁷

With Barney's words in mind, I would like to turn to Vivien's work, and look specifically at her fears for the future of her work, and how this pessimism is offset by her interpretation of Sappho's death. I propose to read Vivien in the spirit of the way she read and wrote Sappho's death into her poetry because I feel it has important implications for the current generation of women readers and writers. Lipking points out, for example, that Vivien's translation of Sappho's second ode leaves the

poet on the brink of death, but this is by no means her final word. Instead, she picks up the theme of Sappho's death several times and elaborates on it, composing what amounts to an epitaph for Sappho's tomb that might make an apt inscription for her own headstone. Especially important are the verse dramas Vivien wrote about Sappho's death, the last and longest of which appeared in her 1908 volume, *Sillages*.¹⁸

As I mentioned earlier, Vivien had stopped writing about Sappho in 1907 for reasons that she elaborates in her transitional volume, *À l'heure des mains jointes* (1906). The few sapphic poems in *Sillages* are important exceptions, constituting what Jean-Paul Goujon considers Vivien's "adieu" to Sappho since she only evokes her dead, or "vaincue" (*Tes caresses* 397). However, it is not Sappho's passionate and tragic suicide that stirred Vivien's imagination as it had stirred so many nineteenth-century artists, musicians, and writers.¹⁹ Rather, Sappho's suicidal leap from the Leucadian cliff becomes a jumping off point for the revival of the Lesbian's memory, and the celebration of a sapphic tradition in which "mourning has no place." The words are Sappho's, but the sentiment goes to the heart of Vivien's revival of Sappho which is surprisingly untouched by her profound pessimism and personal cult of death. As Karla Jay has pointed out, Sappho inspired Vivien to create "the work most devoid of self-pity and morbidity" (66).

Before we follow Vivien to the edge of Sappho's Leucadian cliff, I would like to examine the forces that may have driven her there. The morbidity and self-pity of which Jay speaks became a permanent part of Vivien's work after 1906 — what amounts to the post-Sappho phase of her career. Although she wrote and published prolifically from the time of her first volume appeared in 1901 until her

death in 1909, the tone and quality of her writing changed considerably during the three years she was without her muse. The peak year of her literary production, 1903, was the same year she published her translation and adaptation of Sappho along with four books of her own poems, and two works under the pseudonym Paule Riversdale. Sappho remained central to Vivien's poetic vision until 1907. *À l'heure des mains jointes* (1906) is a transitional volume that documents, in effect, the forces undermining the wholeness of Vivien's Sapphic vision, and particularly her concern with the reception of her own work. It also has the distinction of being the only volume of her poems to be translated into English in its entirety, although it is currently out of print. Renée Vivien worked unusually hard on *À l'heure*, which she believed to contain some of her best work, and was so confident of public approval that she requested 2,200 copies printed — a rather large number for that period. Yet, *À l'heure* alternates between optimism and pessimism, illustrating, in effect, the poet's transition from a positive sapphic mode to deep pessimism characterized by a loss of faith in her work, disconnection from the world and, especially, the fear that her poems would be misunderstood and finally forgotten.

The title is a paraphrase of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's verse "the hour of sisterly sweet hand-in-hand," and conjures up an image of supportive female friendship. The many poems Vivien wrote in this vein, such as "Psappha revit," are extremely optimistic about the immortality of Sappho and her sapphic disciples, which includes the Sappho of 1900 herself:

Psappha revit et règne en nos corps frémis-
sants; / Comme elle, nous avons écouté la
sirène, / Comme elle encore, nous avons
l'âme sereine, / Nous qui n'entendons
point l'insulte des passants. /... / Nos jours
sans impudeur, sans crainte ni remords, /

Se déroulent ainsi que de larges accords,
/ Et nous aimons, comme on aimait à
Mytilène.

(À l'heure, OPC 252)

Vivien's Lesbos is a sanctuary for women lovers but, back in the heterosexual world where she lived, wrote, and published, her lesbianism was under attack. Elyse Blankley has demonstrated how Vivien's poeticized Lesbos contrasted sharply with the reality of Paris 1900 where lesbian sensuality was degraded and subjected to voyeuristic male desires. Her challenge, according to Blankley, was to "redeem Sappho from male authors who had exploited Lesbos as a form of thinly disguised pornography or as a shocking affront to bourgeois morality" (49). My discussion below supports Blankley's claim that, through her poetry, Vivien was able to make her readers "see Mytilene for the first time — not as a Parisian erotic object, but as a source of female power" (50). The process, however, was painful and, as much as she tried to ignore "l'insulte des passants," Vivien was clearly distressed by public disapproval. Numerous poems in *À l'heure des mains jointes* reveal her sadness over being misunderstood, especially when she trades the protection of the collective "we" for the vulnerable first person singular. In "Ainsi je parlerai," for example, the proud poet explains:

Comme je ne cherchais que l'amour, obsédée / Par un regard, les gens de bien m'ont lapidée. / Moi, je n'écoutais plus que la voix que j'aimais, / Ayant compris que nul ne comprendrait jamais. / Pourtant, la nuit approche, et mon nom périssable / S'efface, tel un mot qu'on écrit sur le sable. / L'ardeur des lendemains sait aussi décevoir: / Nul ne murmurerà mes strophes, vers le soir.

(À l'heure, OPC 254)

Misunderstood, but still not defeated, Vivien could remain serene for the moment,

knowing that her considerable talent was still appreciated by a small, select audience, but she became more and more aware that her work did not have the popular appeal of Anna de Noailles' poetry. "Sans Fleurs à votre front" was supposedly written in response to Anna de Noailles, who slighted Vivien by ignoring an invitation from her. Vivien compares her lack of success with Noailles' popularity: "Je ne suis point de ceux que la foule renomme, / Mais de ceux qu'elle hait ... Car j'osai concevoir / Qu'une vierge amoureuse est plus belle qu'un homme" (*À l'heure*, OPC 274). She threatens Noailles with an insult borrowed from Sappho herself:

Vous ne cueillerez point les roses de Psapha. / Vous ne verrez jamais les jardins et les berges / Où résonna l'accord puissant de son paktis, / Et vous n'entendrez point le chœur sacré des vierges, / Ni l'hymne d'Eranna ni le sanglot d'Atthis.

(À l'heure, OPC 274)

Gathering the roses of Sappho is a direct reference to Sappho's fragment L-P 55:

You will lie dead, nor will there be anyone / remembering you later; for you have no share / in the roses of Pieria, but will roam unseen / in the house of Hades, having flown off among dim corpses.²⁰

The context for this fragment is lost, but commentators agree that it is a vicious attack directed at a woman lacking poetic talent. According to Anne Phippen Burnett, "The inference is plain: Sappho's pupils were not like this. They were not even just sweet-voiced girls, but true musicians, disciples who had been given a whiff at least of the Pierian rose."²¹ Greek scholars disagree about the nature of Sappho's circle. Wilamowitz popularized the notion that she was the head mistress of a public academy for girls. Russo supports the idea of a closely and formally organized

women's association, "for the worship of Aphrodite, the Graces and the Muses, and the cultivation in life and ritual celebration in song, of all those tender emotions in human relationships that the Greeks credited to the power of the irresistible Cyprian"²² (722). Maurice Bowra specifies that Sappho's group was dedicated to the cult of Aphrodite of which Sappho was chief priestess. Still others, such as Denys L. Page, reject the notion of any formal or professional relationship between Sappho and her companions.²³ The majority of Sappho scholars, however, concur on one important point: that Sappho was surrounded by a circle of women for and about whom she sang.

"The roses of Pieria" refers to a region near Mount Olympus considered the birthplace of the Muses. She who gathers roses there partakes in divine poetic inspiration and, by extension, is destined to be remembered. The Muses, it must be pointed out, are more than just sources of inspiration; they are also the daughters of Zeus and the Goddess of Memory, and the original sense of their name is "reminder." As we have seen, Vivien was more than a little sensitive to anything having to do with being remembered. The woman deprived of Pierian roses is a bad poet, and the implication is that a bad poet is simply not worth the trouble to remember. Vivien, however, does not condemn Noailles for lack of talent or inspiration, but because she lacks specifically in *sapphic* inspiration. She replaces the Pierian roses with Sappho's roses, elevating her to the status of Muse and, as we have seen already, implicating the Greek poet in her own two-fold need to remember and be remembered. Instead of imagining Noailles wandering forgotten in Hades as in the original fragment, Vivien bans her from Lesbos, her ideal paradise for women poets. The insistence on women-inspired poetry, written for women and remembered by them, is central to her in-

terpretation of Sappho. Although Noailles is a woman poet, she cannot qualify for membership in Sappho's circle because she did not write for and about women.

A turn-of-the-century reader familiar with both Vivien and Noailles would recognize the audacity of her comparison in "Sans fleurs." Anna de Noailles was the most popular woman poet of her day; her books were astounding bestsellers and she was the most decorated *femmes de lettres* of her generation, becoming the first woman elected to the Royal Belgian Academy of Language and Literature (the year before Colette), and the first woman to receive the rank of Commander of the Legion of Honor. Noailles had a tremendous following, but some literary critics did not appreciate her talent and blamed her popularity on her snob appeal. Among them was J. Ernest-Charles, a Vivien proponent who believed she was much more talented than the Comtesse de Noailles. In an article written in 1904, he expresses his exasperation at a public whose enthusiasm was due more to Noailles' aristocratic name than to her talent, and speculates that Vivien's reception would be quite different if her name was Noailles.²⁴

Buoyed by her popularity and her own iron-clad ego, Anna de Noailles did not share Vivien's uncertainty about whether or not she would be remembered, but instead found inspiration in prematurely proclaiming her posthumous glory. She was convinced that the intense passion of her works would seduce future readers, even to the point that they would prefer her poetry to the company of their wives.²⁵ Moreover, she imagines her audience as male when she writes: "Mes livres, je les fis pour vous, ô jeunes hommes."²⁶ Vivien counters this with "Vous pour qui j'écrivis," also from *À l'heure*, in which she imagines an ideal readership that is exclusively feminine:

Vous pour qui j'écrivis, ô belles jeunes femmes! / Vous que, seules, j'aimais, relirez-vous mes vers / Par les futurs matins neigeant sur l'univers, / Par les soirs futurs de roses et de flammes?

(À l'heure, OPC 299)

She follows this poem with another that answers the question negatively:

Non! par les soirs futurs de roses et de flammes, / Mystérieux ainsi que les temples hindous, / Nul ne saura mon nom et nulle d'entre vous / Ne redira mes vers, ô belles jeunes femmes!

(À l'heure, OPC 299)

The future clearly interests Vivien who searches for some assurance her memory will be served as she served Sappho's but, perhaps in light of the negative criticism her work was receiving at this crucial point in her career, she began anticipating the other possibilities too vividly. The powerful imagery of "Le pilori," for example, shows the poet not only as misunderstood, but publicly humiliated by men and women alike:

Pendant longtemps, je fus clouée au pilori / Et des femmes, voyant que je souffrais, ont ri, / Puis, des hommes ont pris dans leurs mains une boue / Qui vint éclabousser mes tempes et ma joue.

(À l'heure, OPC 300)

Finally, in "Vaincue," she acknowledges: "Mes vers n'ont pas atteint à la calme excellence, / Je l'ai compris, et nul ne les lira jamais..." (À l'heure, OPC 301).²⁷

Vivien had never thought highly of the public but, following the publication of *À l'heure des mains jointes*, she withdrew her books from public circulation because, as she explained to Natalie Barney:

Je ne vends plus mon âme à 3 fr. 50 l'exemplaire. Tu te demanderas peut-être

pourquoi j'ai accompli cet acte. Toute simplement parce que le public est laid, et que mon livre — un de mes livres, celui que j'aime le plus peut-être — pourrait tomber entre des mains sales, aux ongles noirs.

(qtd. in *Tes caresses* 379)

Vivien had already expressed strong distaste for publishing in *Une femme m'apparut* where she compares the woman of letters to a prostitute. According to the narrator, the courtesan, who only sells her body to a limited number of individuals, is more modest than the woman writer "qui vend son âme, tirée à des milliers d'exemplaires. L'âme nue est plus impudique que le corps dévoilé" (99).

We must remember that with a personal fortune at her disposal, Vivien had the luxury of publishing only to please herself, not the ugly public. Vivien's principal publisher, Lemerre, printed her work at the author's expense. Her last few works of poetry were only printed in a small number which she distributed to personal friends. The horror she felt for the market place was soon equalled by her horror of the public place, and she became a recluse who traded the security of her enclosed garden on Mytilene for the four walls of her Parisian apartment. "Intérieur" describes the writer's retreat as a closed and darkened room. Thus protected and closed away from the insulting stares of the outside world, she could at last feel at peace:²⁸

Dans mon âme a fleuri le miracle des roses / Pour le mettre à l'abri, tenons les portes closes / ... / Je ne sais plus si l'on médit de nous, ni si / L'on parle encore... Les mots ne font plus mal ici. / tenons les portes closes...

(À l'heure, OPC 303)

That a defeated Vivien who had resigned her work to obscurity and herself to an early demise would return to Sappho's death at this

point in her career is rather odd given that she had already written several versions. However, that she would elaborate the same material, expanding her eighty-line verse drama “La mort de Psappha” (*Évocations* 103) into nearly 300 lines in “Dans un verger” (*Sillages* 1908), suggests some significant additions. The biggest change is that she clearly writes herself into the longer version, speaking through the persona of the messenger or *l'Étrangère*, a foreigner or stranger who arrives on Lesbos at the moment of Sappho's death.

Before we analyze her role, the origin of this persona needs some explaining. Vivien first encountered the figure of *l'Étrangère* in a poem by the Greek poet Nossis, which is usually interpreted as an epitaph addressed to a passerby:²⁹

Stranger, if you sail towards Mytilene of
the beautiful dances / to be inspired by
the flower of Sappho's charms, / Say that
the land of Locri gave birth to one dear to
the Muses, / and when you have learned
that my name is Nossis, / go your way.
(Trans. Snyder 78)

Vivien includes this poem and several others by Nossis in *Les Kitharèdes* (1904), or players of the cithara. This was her second translation from the Greek, and contained all the poetry from the *Greek Anthology* by women — fourteen poets in all. Since little is known about the lives of these poets, Vivien combined scholarship and poetry into creative myth-making, much as she had previously done for Sappho. She composed biographical introductions to each poet, supplemented with literal translations and prose paraphrases, and elaborated selected verses into original poems. She mingles her voice with theirs, but she takes a step further towards connecting ancient Lesbos with fin-du-siècle Paris as she would ultimately do by assuming the Stranger's role — she

commissioned several portraits to illustrate *Les Kitharèdes* from the famous artist Lévy-Dhurmer. Following Vivien's instructions, he modeled his portraits of the Greek poets after contemporary women poets. Anyta, for example, was given the face of Anna de Noailles (!), and Korinna is recognizable as Natalie Clifford Barney, to whom Vivien dedicated her translation.³⁰

Nowhere does Vivien's face appear but, if we were to identify her with any of the Greek cithara players, it would be with the figure Nossis addresses as the Stranger. The role of the Stranger was certainly appropriate for a lesbian expatriot like Vivien who lived very much outside of the mainstream values of patriarchal and heterosexist fin-du-siècle French society. Vivien makes this identification explicit in a prose chapter from *Les Kitharèdes* called “Variations sur un thème.” She repeats the poem by Nossis quoted above, prefacing it with this explanation: “Je suis celle que Nossis à la voix de femme envoya vers toi en me disant, ‘Étrangère, si tu navigues vers Mytilène...’” She continues: “Et Psappha me répondit, les yeux rivés sur les yeux d'Eranna: ‘Quelqu'un, je crois, se souviendra dans l'avenir de nous’” (182). In addition to this prose section, Vivien includes several expanded poetic variations on the same theme in *Les Kitharèdes*, several of which emphasize how close Nossis is to Sappho. Using nearly the same words as “Psappha revit,” Vivien, in the voice of Nossis, calls herself Sappho's “pieuse disciple, à ton autel brisé / J'ai rallumé l'ardeur expirante des flammes.” Then, as if affirming her role in assuring Sappho's immortality, she repeats the sapphic fragment so dear to Vivien, “N'as-tu point dit ... ‘Quelqu'un, dans l'avenir, se souviendra de nous, / Les Muses, à qui plaît la voix des amoureuses, Nous firent glorieuses’” (237), as if affirming her role in assuring Sappho's immortality. As

a traveller to Lesbos, both in her imagination and in real life (since Vivien owned a villa on the island), she could fulfil the role of messenger and grant the request Nossis may have had carved on her tomb.

That *l'Étrangère* originates with Nossis seems significant if we review the few facts known about her. She comes from Locri, a Greek colony in southern Italy that some scholars argue was matrilinear. According to Jane Snyder, "It is perhaps only a curious coincidence that the epigrams of Nossis, written about 300 B.C., seem to reflect a distinctly female world centered around the worship of Hera and Aphrodite; of the twelve extant epigrams, only two focus on males" (77). Gow and Page, two rather conservative editors of *The Greek Anthology*, make some helpful comments on A.P. 7.718, as Nossis' Stranger epigram is known. First, they assume that these lines are probably an epitaph, "for persons who have lost their lives abroad and wish their deaths reported at home."³¹ The poet's death is not explicitly mentioned, but it is a useful context for the sake of my argument, because it illustrates how a poet's words may live on after her, and it also suggests that remembering is a proper sapphic response to the death of a sister poet. Secondly, Gow and Page concur with Snyder that Nossis "declares herself within the poetic tradition of Sappho of Lesbos" (79). Nossis and Vivien are sisters in a long line of women poets that extends from Sappho in ancient Greece, to the present day.

Vivien's final verse drama represents an important return from isolation to a community, back to the tradition she had given all evidence of having abandoned. Her elaborations on the stranger's connection to "us," that is, her interaction with Sappho's circle of disciples, makes up the bulk of the difference between "La mort de Psappha" and the longer version, "Dans un verger." Both verse dramas

are set at Sappho's school of poetry, and the principal action does not evolve around Sappho, but around the arrival of *l'Étrangère*. In the first and shorter verse drama, she is warmly greeted by Sappho's companions who invite her to "viens cueillir avec nous les roses de Psappha: / Elle enseigne les chants qui plaisent aux Déesses" (OPC 105). Her welcome is briefly interrupted by Sappho who appears covered in dark veils. She speaks sadly of her lost love and then disappears. Karla Jay has commented that in this and other poems in which Vivien describes Sappho's death, she "arranges matters so that the disciples could prevent the death of Sappho but *choose not to*. Neither tradition nor Barney concur with this interpretation, but it was one wholly consistent with Vivien's personal cult of death" (Jay's emphasis, 70). Eranna, Atthis, and company seem to live vicariously through Sappho's tragic passion and listen attentively to the echo of her agonised cry as she leaps (off stage) to her death and her body is carried out to sea. Psappha "vient de s'éteindre ainsi qu'une harmonie" (OPC 108).

Despite the reluctance of Sappho's disciples to intervene in her destiny, the poem ends on an uplifting note as victorious chords of lyres drown out the sorrowful cries of her followers who scatter roses not on the sea, the site of Sappho's death, but on the threshold of her house. These are presumably Pierian roses, gathered directly from their muse herself, because although Sappho is absent, she remains an inspiring presence. The final speech in "La mort de Psappha" belongs to the stranger who, repeating a sapphic fragment, encourages the women poets to sing instead of weeping:

O compagnes, les pleurs sont de légères
choses / Qui ne conviennent point au glorieux
trépas... / Chantez! Il faut remplir de
rythmes et de roses / La maison du poète
où le deuil n'entre pas!

(OPC 108)

Once again, we have no clear context for interpreting the original sapphic verses which David Campbell translates: "For it is not right that there should be lamentation in the house of those who serve the Muses. That would not be fitting for us."³² Russo's comments on the original fragment help clarify what Vivien may mean by "la maison du poète." He interprets the original word *Mousopolos* as not just "a metaphor for 'poet,' but a term specially appropriate for one who has formally dedicated oneself to the cult of the Muses, and the activities of the members of that cult. One of these activities was obviously the performance of songs for other members (*hetairai*) of the group" (723).

The "Poet's House" is a place such as Vivien imagined Mytilene, where women poet dedicated to the Muses perform for each other. The emphasis is on *group* interaction, and this is precisely on what Vivien elaborates in her longer 1908 version of Sappho's death. More emphasis is placed on the reception of *l'Étrangère*, who, although timid and covered with dust from her long journey, is immediately recognized as a beautiful poet, "digne de nos chœurs" (OPC 329). The disciples give the newcomer food and drink, and introduce themselves. In a line strangely reminiscent of "Vous, pour qui j'écrivis, ô belles jeunes femmes," *l'Étrangère* tells them: "Plus tard je chanterai pour vous plaire / ô très belles!... / Je suis lasse d'avoir erré... Mais grâce aux Dieux / Je me repose enfin parmi vos chœurs heureux" (OPC 331). The Stranger, who is no stranger to women's poetry, recognizes Eranna (the most famous Kitharède) who "avec humilité altière" repeats (once again!) Sappho's words: "Someone in the future will remember us." With the foresight of the time traveller she is, *l'Étrangère* assures her that "ton nom sera grand dans l'avenir futur" and that "Le sort des chants obscurs entassés dans l'oubli /

N'est pas le tien" (334). As if she had travelled to join the lesbian women poets from the twentieth century, the Stranger is confident in repeatedly telling them that their future glory and, by extension, hers, is assured.

At this point in the verse drama, Sappho is heard moaning off stage as she builds her courage for her tragic leap. She appears veiled, and has two lines before she exits to hurl herself into the sea but, as in the earlier version, her companions do nothing to stop her. Instead, they quote from her "Prayer to Aphrodite" and blame Eros for her pain. At the moment of Sappho's demise, the Stranger takes the floor to encourage her sister poets not to mourn: "Respecte la maison des serviteurs des Muses, / Cette auguste maison où le deuil n'entre pas. / Ne pleurez plus! ... Chantez comme l'on chante en la maison des Dieux!" (OPC 342). The final stage direction calls for the virgins to pick up their instruments, encircle their heads with braided wreaths of roses, and resume singing.

Sappho's death is recounted in similar fashion in *Une femme m'apparut* by San Giovanni who assumes the same role played by the Stranger. San Giovanni, an androgynous poet who is always a "she," serves in the novel as the author's alter ego. In her introduction to the novel, Gayle Rubin calls San Giovanni "Renée's better half, her common sense, the courageous poet of Lesbos: in short, the core of Vivien's identity which remained intact from the devastation of her unhappy passion" (xiii). Her characterization of San Giovanni seems to fit with my reading of the Stranger. Like Vivien's Stranger persona, San Giovanni spans time and space in her service to Sappho. She lived on Lesbos in a former life, she says, and, although she was too awkward and ugly to become Sappho's lover, she was one of her students at the time of Sappho's death:

J'étais en Sicile quand j'appris sa mort;
 mais cette mort était si glorieuse que je ne
 pleurais point, et que les larmes de mes
 compagnes me surprirent et m'offensèrent.
 Je leur rappelai ses paroles magnanimes:
 «Car il n'est pas juste que la lamentation
 soit dans la maison des serviteurs des
 Muses: Cela est indigne de nous.» (40)

These words, repeated by Vivien in almost as many contexts as the fragment with which I began this discussion, are vital to understanding her relationship to a sapphic tradition. We have already encountered the "House of Muses" in the sapphic fragment Vivien uses against Noailles; those who do not serve the Muses are disconnected from their sisters and destined to be forgotten. The "House of Muses" is Vivien's source of strength — both her assurance that her poetry and the sapphic tradition it represents will be remembered and continued, and her insurance against the hostility of unsympathetic readers.

Judith Grahn, a contemporary lesbian poet and critic, interprets the same sapphic fragments in her discussion of Sappho and the lesbian Poetic tradition, *The Highest Apple* (1985).³³ Grahn mixes poetics and pragmatism in her interpretation of the House of Muses which she takes outside of a purely literary context and places in the real world. For Grahn, the House of Muses is clearly connected with collective feminine power and thought, women-centred public institutions whose equivalents include "the midwife and market women guilds, the priestess schools, the art-letters-and-sciences colleges of women, the divinatory and healing societies, all the variety of forms the center of female will and intelligence has structured itself into in order to influence, guide and lead society" (14).

Renée Vivien's fin-du-siècle vision of Sappho's circle of companions is a poetic variation on this theme which Grahn, reading from

her own fin-du-siècle perspective, can interpret in a practical way that makes sense for our lives today. Although Vivien was unable to successfully connect her poetic vision to the day-to-day reality of her life, "connection" and "community" are nevertheless at the heart of the message her poems still carry to modern-day readers. Readers, poets, and critics like Grahn and this writer are prepared to move beyond depressing images of a suicidal poet, toward evaluating Vivien's contribution in more positive terms.

Among the contemporary influences helping to steer us in this direction are psychological object-relation theories such as those pioneered by Carol Gilligan and Dorothy Dinnerstein, which have given feminist critics a new perspective on the relationship between community and women's writing. In *Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse*, Mary K. De-Shazer discusses the relationship between women poets and their muse. She coins the phrase "affirmation of influence" to replace Bloom's anxiety of influence,³⁴ and argues that "Women poets name their muses not by casting off or consuming or appropriation, but by taking on, connecting, inheriting ... the woman poet typically strives to establish continuity, to connect aesthetically with her foremothers, her contemporaries, her muses" (6). In her work on feminist models of reading, Patrocínio Schweickart advocates happy endings, calling for a "positive hermeneutic whose aim is the recovery and cultivation of women's culture" (35).³⁵ There are glimpses of such a positive mode of reading Vivien's interpretations of Sappho that anticipates the motivation of contemporary feminist readers, including my own more optimistic reading of Vivien's poetry. According to Schweickart:

feminist readings of female texts are motivated by the need "to connect," to recuperate, or to formulate — they come to

the same thing — the context, the tradition, that would link women writers to one another, to women readers and critics, and to the larger community of women. (32)

The striving for continuity and connection of which Grahn, DeShazer and Schweickart speak inspired some of Vivien's best and most optimistic writing. Unfortunately, it was only in her imagination and, finally, in death, that she was finally able to come home to the "House of Muses" she celebrated in her poetry. Spanning the space of nearly a century since her own death, and thousands of years since Sappho lived, Vivien continues to play

the messenger poet. Her poems, echoing Sappho's fragments, remind us that service to the Muses leaves no place for mourning; the proper response is to sing, that is, to carry on a tradition of women writing for and about each other. The example of Vivien's tragic death should not be allowed to invalidate the importance of this vital message which, for me, is her ultimate legacy to modern women readers and writers. In the spirit of Nossis' epitaph, the appropriate inscription for Vivien's tomb is not an "adieu," but an invitation. If I may indulge in a bit of vivienesque lyricism, I like to imagine Renée Vivien on the threshold of the House of Muses, standing amid Pierian rose petals and beckoning us to enter.

NOTES

1. Of the nine original books into which Sappho's estimated 500 poems were arranged, only 700 lines have survived which have been pieced together from various sources — from examples used by Greek grammarians, to torn strips of papyrus manuscripts that were used to wrap mummies in Egypt and only discovered in 1897. Many of Sappho's poems were lost due to the efforts of the Catholic church and especially Nazianzos, Bishop of Constantinople. He ordered the books burnt in 380 A.D. In 391 A.D., the classical library in Alexandria was partially destroyed by Christian zealots and, in 1073, Pope Gregory VII had Sappho's works publicly burnt in Rome and in Constantinople. While homophobia certainly played a role, a great part of the blame must also be attributed to the neglect of classical texts in general.
2. Susan Gubar, "Sapphistries," *Signs* 10.1 (Autumn 1984): 43-62. Also see Elaine Marks, "Lesbian Intertextualities," *Homosexualities in French Literature*, eds. Elaine Marks and George Stambolian (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1970): 353-377. For an excellent and thorough discussion of Sappho in the French tradition, see Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989). Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig illustrate the notion of Sappho as a blank page, by leaving the entry under her name blank in their *Lesbian People's Material for a Dictionary* (New York: Avon Books, 1976).
3. The most complete biography of Vivien to date is Jean-Paul Goujon, *Tes blessures sont plus douces que leurs caresses: Vie de Renée Vivien* (Paris: Régine Deforges, 1986). Gale Rubin has written an informative introduction to Vivien's life as a preface to *A Woman Appeared to Me* by Renée Vivien, trans. Jeanette Foster (Naiad Press, 1976), iv-xxxii. Also see Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988). Essential reading for an understanding of the often complex cultural and literary contexts of Paris-Lesbos is Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986).
4. André Billy, *L'Époque 1900: 1885-1905* (Paris: J. Tallandier, 1951), 227.
5. Renée Vivien, *Une femme m'apparut...* (1904; rpt. Paris: Régine Deforges, 1977). Vivien wrote two versions of this novel which is about her relationship with Natalie Clifford Barney. The 1904 version, translated by Foster and reprinted by Régine Deforges, was written before she and Barney made their first trip to Lesbos where they had a brief reconciliation; the 1906 version is kinder to Barney. Vivien was a noted world traveller who continued to visit several times a year the villa she purchased on the island of Lesbos. See Jean-Paul Goujon, *Renée Vivien à Mytilène* (Reims: À l'Écart, 1978).
6. There are two editions of Vivien's complete works. The Arno Press reprinted the 1923 edition in 1975.

More recently, Jean-Paul Goujon produced a new edition based on the 1934 text published by Lemerre — the edition on which Vivien was working when she died. *Œuvre poétique complète de Renée Vivien (1877-1910)*, ed. and preface Jean-Paul Goujon (Paris: Régine Deforges, 1986). The twelve volumes contained in both editions are: *Études et préludes* (1901), *Cendres et poussières* (1902), *Évocations* (1903), *Sapho* (1903), *La Vénus des aveugles* (1904), *Les Kitharèdes* (1904), *À l'heure des mains jointes* (1906), *Sillages* (1908), *Flambeaux éteints* (1907), *Dans un coin de violettes* (1910), *Le vent des vaisseaux* (1910), and *Hailions* (1910). The last three were published posthumously. Goujon's edition includes a preface and some "found" and uncollected poems, in addition to poems signed by Paule Riversdale and Hélène de Zuylen, which he attributes to Vivien. Paule Riversdale was the collective pseudonym of Vivien and Zuylen, but most scholars agree that Zuylen had little to do with the actual writing. Most of Vivien's poetry has not been published in English, but there are two English translations: *The Muse of the Violets: Poems by Renée Vivien*, trans. Margaret Porter and Catharine Kroger (Naiad Press, 1982), and *At the Sweet Hour of Hand in Hand*, trans. Sandia Belgrade (Naiad Press, 1979).

Vivien's prose works include a novel, *Une femme m'apparut...* (see note 5 above); two collections of prose poems, *Brumes de fjords* (Paris: Lemerre, 1902) and *Du vert au violet* (Paris: Lemerre, 1903); a collection of short stories, *La Dame à la louve* (1904; rpt. in English translation as *The Woman of the Wolf*, New York: Gay Presses of New York, 1983); and an unfinished biography, *Anne Bolyn: Reproduction en fac-similé des épreuves uniques de l'édition jamais tirée de Lemerre* (1909), intro. Jean-Paul Goujon (Muizon: L'Écart, 1982).

Subsequent references to Vivien's poems will be included in the text with the name of the volume, and the corresponding page numbers from Goujon's French edition, cited as OPC.

7. Natalie Clifford Barney, *Aventures de l'esprit* (Paris: 1929; rpt. Persona, 1982), 200.
8. Yves-Gérard Le Dantec, *Renée Vivien, femme damnée, femme sauvée* (Aix-en-Provence: Éditions du Feu, 1930): 18.
9. Elaine Marks, "'Sappho 1900': Imaginary Renée Vivien's and the Rear of the *belle époque*," *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 175-189.
10. The most famous portrait of Vivien is found in Colette, *Ces plaisirs...* (Paris: Ferenczi et fils, 1932)

whose title was changed to *Le pur et l'impur* in 1941. For Barney's impressions of her friend, see "Natalie Barney on Renée Vivien," trans. Margaret Porter, *Heresies* (Fall 1977): 65-71.

11. Pamela J. Annas, "'Drunk with chastity': The Poetry of Renée Vivien," *Women's Studies* 13 (1986): 11-22.
12. Cassandra Laity, "H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadence and Sapphic Modernism," *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, eds. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York UP, 1990), 217-240. Unlike Laity, I am not convinced that Swinburne was such a negative influence on Vivien. She adored his writing, and a well-worn set of Swinburne's works, annotated in Vivien's hand, was found in her personal library. More work remains to be done on the influence his poetry had on Vivien's writing. A recent study that suggests some interesting possibilities is Joyce Zonana, "Swinburne's Sappho: The Muse as Sister-Goddess," *Victorian Poetry* 28.1 (Spring 1990): 39-50. Also of interest is Camille Paglia's provocative reading of Swinburne's "Anactoria," and especially her notion that in this poem, Sappho's maleness is asserted by her claim to artistic immortality ("Someone will remember us in the future") which relies on devouring, vampire-like, the life of the reader. "Nature, Sex and Decadence," in *Pre-Raphaelite Poets*, ed. Harole Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986): 219-237.
13. Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Love and Friendship Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1981), 361-362.
14. Lawrence Lipking uses Sappho as a main model in *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988). He argues that "The tradition of women's poetry in the West (at least until the twentieth century) might very nearly be identical with the transmission and rehabilitation of Sappho" (97). His discussion is compelling but, as my present study makes clear, I disagree with what Lipking calls "A paradox of Sappho's influence: she teaches her later sisters that they are alone. The touch of Sappho brings no companionship but only intensified solitude" (99). Another critic who has problems with Lipking's "poetics of abandonment" is Joan DeJean. In her "Fictions of Sappho," *Critical Inquiry* 13 (Summer 1987): 787-805, she particularly attacks male writers who have appropriated "the right to formulate discourse of female passion," and argues that Lipking wants to make feminist literary critics into abandoned women as well. I agree wholeheartedly with DeJean's assertion that "Sappho

- consistently portrays both the composition and the performance of verse as an exchange among women, as the product of a female community whose members are united by bonds both personal and professional" (790). DeJean extends her argument in her new book on Sappho (see note 2 above).
15. Shari Benstock, "Paris Lesbianism and the Politics of Reaction: 1900-1940," *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: Meridian Books, 1990), 344.
 16. An earlier version of this essay entitled "The Failure of Renée Vivien's Sapphic Vision" was presented at Women, the Arts and Society Conference sponsored by Susquehanna University in November 1988. Special thanks to the participants in my session, and especially to Prescilla who encouraged me to look beyond Vivien's failure.
 17. Barney routinely organized literary evenings as part of her Academy of Women, a forum she created in 1927 to encourage an exchange between French- and English-speaking women of letters. The program she planned for "An Hour of Poetry in Memory of Renée Vivien" is preserved in her legacy of documents housed at the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet in Paris (Ms. 99-102). The program lists the poems she planned to read, and topping the list is "Sur la place publique" or "Le pilori," both of which describe Vivien at her most depressed and misunderstood. The line quoted is from Barney's poem "La mort du poète," *Actes et entr'actes* (Paris: Sansot, 1910), 235. Barney remained unconvinced that Vivien's conversion to the Catholic faith was sincere.
 18. In addition to "La mort de Psappha" (*Évocations*, OPC 104-108) and "Dans un verger" (*Sillages*, OPC 327-342), Vivien describes Sappho's death in "Atthis délaissée" (*Évocations*, OPC 128); and an Italianized version, "La Dogaresse" (*La Vénus des aveugles*, OPC 204-207).
 19. Ovid's *Heroides* 15 is the most influential source for the myth of Sappho's suicide because of her unrequited love for the mythical ferryman, Phaon. Her connection with Phaon and her supposed leap from the white Leucadian cliff have no basis in any of her work. References to white rocks abound in classical literature, and Gregory Nagy discusses some of the numerous possibilities in "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973): 137-177. He suggests that instead of suicide, "falling from the white rock is parallel to falling into a swoon — be it from intoxication or from making love" (142). Another interesting possibility he mentions is that the leap was meant as a cure for love (143) — something like the Greek equivalent of a cold shower!
 20. Vivien also translates and elaborates on this fragment in her *Sappho*, 159-160, given here in Jane McIntosh Snyder's translation from *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1989), 34.
 21. Anne Phippen Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983), 216.
 22. J. Russo, "Reading the Greek Lyric Poets (Monodists)," *Arion* 1.4 (1973-74): 722.
 23. C.M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961). Denys L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 139-140. On the question of Sappho's audience, also see Jack Winkler, "Gardens of Nymphs: Public and Private in Sappho's Lyrics," *Women's Studies* 8 (1981): 65-91, and Judith P. Hallett, "Sappho and Her Social Context: Sense and Sensuality," *Signs* 4.3 (1979): 447-464.
 24. J. Ernest-Charles, "Les Poétesses," *Les samedis littéraires* 1st ser. (1903): 252-260, and "Les Poétesses," *Les samedis littéraires* 2nd ser. (1904): 408-418.
 25. Anna de Noailles, "Les regrets," *L'ombre du jour* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1902), 169.
 26. Anna de Noailles, "Offrande," *Les éblouissements* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1907), 315. It is sometimes thought that Noailles composed her poem in response to Vivien since "Offrande" is included in her 1907 collection. She actually composed the poem in 1903, and it appeared in the first issue of a new literary journal called *Les essais* in 1904. The "Essayists," a group of young (male) writers who emulated Noailles, were pleased and flattered by the poem which, however, was not written expressly for them. See Claude Mignot-Ogliastri, "Sous l'égide d'Anna de Noailles, une revue de jeunes écrivains: *Les Essais* (1904-1906)," *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 24.2 (1986): 109-123.
 27. Although some readers may find this poem to be ironic, there is real evidence to suggest that Vivien was very concerned about keeping up a respectable public appearance for the sake of her family, especially her sister whose chances of making a good marriage she did not wish to jeopardize. Goujon's notes to this poem suggest that "Le Pilori" was inspired by actual public attacks and insults, and he quotes a letter Vivien wrote to Charles-Brun in 1905:
 J'ai eu tout à fait la sensation du pilori aux courses, le dimanche, et au Café de Paris, aux soupers et aux restaurants où je dînais. Tous

les gens gouailleurs et hostiles qui vous regardent et qui sourient en vous regardant...
(OPC 493)

28. Elyse Blankley analyzes the poem "Intérieur" in her discussion of Vivien, "Return to Mytilene: Renée Vivien and the City of Women," *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Susan Merrill Squier (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1984), 45-67. She argues that "If Vivien appeared to ignore her own female community surrounding her in Paris, she did so because her feminism and lesbianism guided her toward a vision of complete female isolation on Lesbos. Mytilene protects its female tribe from being censured by a disapproving world or transformed into an emblem of erotic perversion" (51). My notion of a "House of Muses" fits in well with the woman-centred community Blankley describes.
29. Snyder includes a chapter on Nossis, pp. 77-84 (see note 20 above). She does not mention Vivien, but quotes a poem by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) created on lines by Nossis. Another poet from this period who was interested in Nossis is Pierre Louys, of *Chansons de Bilitis* fame, who published some translations of Nossis' poetry in *Le Mercure de France*.
30. All these elements were omitted from the edition included in her complete works. Several of the portraits are reproduced in Paul Lorenzo, *Sappho 1900: Renée Vivien* (Paris: Juilliard, 1977).
31. *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams*, eds. A.S.F. Gow and D.L. Page, vol. 2, Commentary and Indexes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1965), 442.
32. Sappho, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, trans. David A. Campbell (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982), 161.
33. Judy Grahn, *The Highest Apple: Sappho and the Lesbian Poetic Tradition* (San Francisco: Spinsters, Ink., 1985), 14.
34. Mary K. DeShazer, *Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1986).
35. Patrocínio P. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," in *Speaking of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1989), 17-44.