Sociocriticism

XXXVIII-2 | 2024
Familia(s): espacios y prácticas.

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Référence électronique
Margaret Gillespie, « *After Sappho* by Selby Wynn Schwartz (2022) or biofiction and the (re)creation of a lesbian literary lineage », *Sociocriticism* [En ligne], XXXVIII-2 | 2024, mis en ligne le 18 février 2025, consulté le 19 février 2025.
URL : http://interfas.univ-tlse2.fr/sociocriticism/3967

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PLAN

TEXTE

Preamble: Reclaiming the Queer Feminine in 20TH Century Modernism

1 The publication of Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank* in 1986 and Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* (1990) stand as watershed moments in the history of modernist studies, showcasing as they do the important place of women, "the forgotten, silenced makers of modernism," (Scott, 1990, p. iv) in experimental artistic movements of the early twentieth century. It was a role that had been long obfuscated by an androcentric critical paradigm that centred on male writers –notably 'The Men of 1914' (Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Lewis)– and their patrilineal acolytes. Scott's diagrammatic "Tangled Mesh of Modernists" for instance, which charts the personal ties

between individual modernist actors, clearly highlights the very real presence of women in the modernist project (Scott 1990, p. xxii). Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers have similarly observed that women were in no way "a sidelight of the literary production of the period" (Hanscombe & Smyers, 1987, p. xviii). However, a handful of exceptions notwithstanding –Virginia Woolf for example– it was a presence that would find itself strikingly absent from literary history for the half century that followed –women who "have been considered marginal to the Modernist effort [...] their contributions catalogued in footnotes in biographies of James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound" (Benstock, 1987, p. ii).

2 Written at a time when women's studies was entering literary academia in the wake of second-wave feminism, Benstock and Scott's works bespeak a fascination and captivation with this unique moment of feminine coming-into–being, a time of "excitement and new freedoms" (Scott, 1990, p. 6) which witnessed forms of emancipation that were far from limited to the political and social sphere. As Benstock and Scott's works convincingly demonstrate, the modernist period, concurrent with feminism's first wave, was significant in that it witnessed the flourishing of a network of female artists whose creative audacity often mirrored lifestyles that were equally avant-garde. These were "women who want[ed] to do things or be people beyond the scope of their expected destiny" (Hanscombe & Smyers, 1987, p. xv), including the bold exploration of non-heteronormative sexuality.

3 Many of the female artists and writers of the early twentieth century, alluring as they were with their talent, glamour and daring, have in their turn inspired and engendered further artistic outputs, notably among women-identified readers, as Carolyn Allen has argued in *Following Djuna*, her study into the literary and affective afterlife of modernist artist, novelist and journalist Djuna Barnes. "I enact an erotics of reading that produces the beginnings of both a literary "tradition" and a "genealogy" " she explains, an approach that she says speaks of the "complex interconnections among readers, writers and texts" – "recollected readings and fleeting fantasies" (Allen 1996, p. 15, p. 3) – that bring together, across the generations, women whose narratives had been long excluded from patriarchal paradigms and which go on to create what one might term a new and on-going al-

ternative, female-centric cultural heritage. More recently, Monica Latham's study of twenty-first century Woolfian biofictions argues that "the reinvention of Woolf amounts to a continuous renaissance and reassessment of her life and work [where] the figure of the author is constantly updated to adapt to new readers and reading practices. The biographized becomes the reflection of the writer-biographers, their epoch and their readers" (Latham, 2017, p. 421).

4 *After Sappho* (2022), a biofiction by Selby Wynn Schwartz revisits and reinvents the modernist moment and its constellation of trailblazing women artists and writers for the contemporary reader. In particular and as its title suggests, the novel celebrates the figure and works of Sappho, both of which were enjoying a renaissance around the turn of the twentieth century, and which provided a key source of inspiration for many women modernists, enabling them, in their turn to be "reborn." Both following in the steps of, and going beyond, their captivating muse, the women thus inscribed themselves in a personal and artistic genealogy beyond the bounds of patriarchy. But *After Sappho* is not nostalgic looking backwards to a halcyon age; rather it offers a reflection on what it is to write queer, female biography and how such a project might, in itself, contribute to the creation of lesbian literary lineage and community. The following article will start by exploring the lure of Sappho for queer female artists of the modernist period, and in particular how the fragmented form of her poetry served their needs. I will then go on to present two writers in more detail, Natalie Barney and Renée Vivien. Moving onto the novel itself, I will demonstrate how Sappho stands as an inspiration for the author and her characters, and how the Sapphic fragment haunts her text. Finally I will discuss *After Sappho* as biofiction and suggest how the choric narrative voice calls for and enacts a collaborative, transhistoric experience of queer female being.

Women Modernists' Search For an Alternative Classical Heritage

Male modernist mythmaking

5 Of course, Modernist writers themselves also revisited the texts of their literary forbears. In particular, both male and female artists of the period returned to the Classics for inspiration. Famously, T.S. Eliot identified in James Joyce's *Ulysses* a "mythical method" –in his experimental reworking of Homer's *Odyssey*– which functioned to at once to regenerate artistically and also to "give order" to a chaotic world in the wake of the horrors of the Great War.

> In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him [....] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history [...] (Eliot, 1923, p. 483).

6 Eliot lauds this process of looking back to antiquity and forward to the present and beyond, not only on account of Joyce's innovative prowess, but also because it enables the revigoration and the consolidation of an existing patrilineal literary heritage, as he argued for instance in his earlier essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), which scrupulously omits any reference to female writers:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has *his* complete meaning alone. *His* significance, *his* appreciation is the appreciation of *his* relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value *him* alone; you must set *him*, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of æsthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that *he* shall conform, that *he* shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it (Eliot, 1919, p. 54-55)[1].

7 This dogged reiteration of a masculinist cultural order has been strongly contested by second-wave feminist scholarship, as Bonnie Kime Scott has noted:

> Since the early 1970s, scholars in women's studies have been investigating the marginalized archive of women's writers and have made

> the case for women having a literary tradition (or traditions) of their own. The supply of women's texts has brought into question the adequacy of the previous canon, disrupting it and questioning canon formation itself (Scott, 1990, p. 2).

Mythologizing Sappho

8 It was also a cultural order that earlier women writers were looking to challenge. Female modernists such as H.D., Nathalie Barney or Renée Vivien looking for a "women's text" turned not to Homer but to the one classical literary luminary at their disposal–Sappho. However, for female authors aiming to revisit Sappho's verse there was no female, let alone queer, literary tradition to contest or to conform to, no method to build on, no "lesbian continuum" as Adrienne Rich (Rich, 2003 [1980], p. 27) would later call it, to celebrate: returning to Sappho and claiming her as their own meant nothing less than unlocking a lost female, lesbian literary legacy, or perhaps more accurately, a bringing into being or *mise-en-texte* of a matrilineage that had never been fully allowed to exist. In this sense Sappho might represent for Susan Gubar "all the lost women of genius in literary history" (Gubar, 1984, p. 46). And if she was seen by many as a kind of "literary foremother" (Greene, 1996, p. 4), it was not least because, since the late nineteenth century, the word used to designate female homosexuality had also derived from the name of the poet of Lesbos. It was also in the Victorian period that interest in Sappho's oeuvre had really taken off thanks in part to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Swinburne's translations [2], as well as the figure of the lesbian femme fatale in the decadent poetry of Swinburne and Baudelaire (Faderman, 1981, p. 269-274). Writing at the turn of the century, with Sapphomania in full swing, early modernist Willa Cather for instance, went as far as to comment that "If all the of the lost riches we could have one master restored to us [...] the choice of the world would be for the lost nine books of Sappho" ("Three Women Poets" quoted in Gubar, 1984, p. 46). At the same time, it was precisely the fact that only a fraction of the nine books that Sappho wrote–650 lines out of a estimated total of over 10,000 lines–actually remained that enabled modernist female authors to write themselves into the poetess's wake. Sappho would go on be held in particular esteem by women writers in the decades that followed, both as an inspirational muse

and as a model for the kind of poetry they wanted to write. And the very incompleteness of her work contributed to the alchemy: the unwitting modernity of the fragmented Sapphic oeuvre furnished the very condition that allowed the writers to become part of its legacy: "precisely because so many of her original Greek texts were destroyed, the modern woman poet could write 'for' or 'as' Sappho and thereby invent a classical inheritance of her own" (Gubar, 1984, p. 46-47). Sappho and her verse thus became an empty space, a potentiality through which female authors and readers could express and explore the relationship between womanhood, authorship and sexuality: "it is in Sappho's broken fragments that the modern woman poet could reinvent Sappho's verse and thus inscribe feminine desire as part of an empowering literary history of their own" (Greene, 1996, p. 4).

Two modernist sapphists: Natalie Barney and Renée Vivien

9 One such writer was rich American heiress, Parisian literary salon hostess and woman of letters Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972) of whom Amy D. Wells writes, "it would only be a slight exaggeration to say that Sappho saved [her] life and made her open, woman-loving lifestyle possible": French and classical Greek scholar, Barney "relied on her knowledge of Sappho to establish a life for herself" (Wells, unpublished manuscript, p. 1). Barney's personal life was unashamedly sapphic–she pursued romances with a number of the women-loving female artists, performers and writers living in the French capital in the early twentieth century including Romaine Brooks, Colette, Renée Vivien, Liane de Pougy, and Eva Palmer. These love affairs were themselves often fueled and sustained by Sapphic legend, which provided the "scenic background" (Gubar 1984, p. 47) to the liaisons. But Sappho's life and work also directly underpinned a significant quantity of Barney's literary output–notably with the translations of Sappho into French (Barney, *Cinq Petits Dialogues Grecs*, 1901) and "Equivoque" (Barney, 1910), a play based on the legend of Sappho's tragic suicide, in which she reprises Ovid's version of events but with significant changes. In Barney's rewriting, Sappho does not take her own life out of love for the boatman Phaon when he weds another, but because of her desire for Timas the latter's betrothed. Moreover,

quoting the stage directions Wells notes how the garden space of Barney's garden in the Parisian suburb of Neuilly merges with that of an imagined topos, transforming it into a "utopian space of the isle of Lesbos and its capital city Mytillini" for the occasion:

> 'In Mytillini. In a garden, in front of a Poetry school of which one can see a few columns. Two tripods. A stone bench. To the left, the Temple of Cypris, towards which the steps lead up. Little statues of Cypris and Eros. To the right, a little altar is being set up' (Wells, unpublished manuscript, p. 3).

10 Certainly the sensitive subject matter of "Equivoque" would have prohibited performance in the public space –as Barney later commented, "Greek plays are no longer performed, Lesbian plays have yet to be performed!" (Barney, 1920, p. 26)[3]–but Barney, who had also visited Lesbos in 1904 with Vivien, was also set on recreating a personal sapphic space in twentieth-century Paris.

11 Renée Vivien, the pseudonym of Pauline Tarne, a self-taught Hellenist and American expatriate like Barney, also shunned her native tongue, publishing *Sapho* (1903), a collection of translations of Sapphic verse and poetry inspired by the Greek fragment form, into French. As Gubar has noted, Vivien's Sappho is a highly "fin de siècle" incarnation, redolent of Baudelaire and Swinburne's decadent celebration of the Sapphic muse. But while her masculine forbears vampirically consume their eroticized and often degraded subject, Vivien gives the Lesbian a voice and in so doing, claims her as the "epitome of the decadent" and decadence itself as a "fundamentally lesbian literary tradition" (Gubar, 1984, p. 49), thereby freeing it from the shackles of the patriarchal bind. As Blankley has argued, this envisioning of the emancipated sapphist was figured through a return to, or at least a re-creation of, Mytilène, what she terms "an authentic metaphor for the glorious possibilities of women loving women" (Blankley, 1984, p. 50). This sense of working through and finally shirking off the patrilineal was also implicit in Vivien's nom de plume, which proclaims her own rebirth (she is *re-née*), constructing both Lesbos and herself outside of a patriarchal viewpoint, and writing her sexuality outside of the heterosexual norm.

Introducing After Sappho

12 It is this same quest for a liberating female-centric artistic and erotic lineage that underpins *After Sappho*, Selby Wynn Schwartz's 2022 Booker long-listed biofiction. As she explains, in a phrase that echoes the second-wave feminist scholars' take on their first-wave literary forebears [4], "at its heart, the book is about trying to find a shape for your life that hasn't already been prescribed as your inevitable, cramped destiny" ("The Galley Beggar Q&A: Selby Wynn Schwartz", online). Schwartz's text returns to the rich and largely familiar constellation of female writers, artists and performers living in turn-of-the-century and early twentieth century Europe and who inspired feminist scholars such Benstock and Scott on account of both their artistic audacity and their stout refusal to comply to conventional, heteronormative womanhood. At the heart of Schwartz's project is the key role the life and work of Sappho would play in their bid for artistic and sexual emancipation: "It's difficult to invent a new form for yourself, so these women looked for models –and there are notoriously few, so they began to style themselves after Sappho, the legendary poet of Lesbos" ("The Galley Beggar Q&A: Selby Wynn Schwartz", online). And just as Schwartz's characters looked to the poet of Lesbos, so too is she similarly drawn, both intellectualy and emotionally, to these women who, as she puts it in one interview, "when they were told because of your gender, you need to be good, self-abnegating, pretty and quiet, they weren't having it" (Across the Pond, 2023, 26:40-26:53). In a move that mirrors that of Carolyn Allen's with Djuna Barnes, Schwartz engages poetically and affectively with them (through "recollected readings and fleeting fantasies") evoking in interviews "a lineage of thinking" and a "potential for kinship" with the women she portrays (Across the Pond, 2023, 26:20-26:22).

13 Among the two dozen or so *dramatis personae* readers encounter in *After Sappho* we find the "usual suspects": Nathalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, Renée Vivien, Sarah Bernhardt, Romaine Brooks, Radclyffe Hall and Virginia Woolf, Colette, Eileen Gray. But Schwartz, who holds a PhD in comparative literature, also introduces a number of Italian protagonists less familiar to the Anglophone reader and showcases the little-known, "violent, luminous" (Schwartz, 2022, 31), " 'golden-

eyed' poet Lina Poletti" (Schwartz, 2022, 30) to whom her novel is dedicated and whose life as turn-of-the century lesbian poet echoes that of her better-known contemporaries: like Vivien she changed her name [5], like Vivien and Barney she learnt Greek in order to translate Sappho until it becomes so much part of herself that "eventually she would learn to translate Sappho without a dictionary" ("LINA POLETTI, c. 1899", Schwartz, 2022, 14). One of many proto-sapphic avatars, Poletti is posited as a model and inspiration for the author and contemporary reader alike:

> A tutti voi che siete Lina Poletti
>
> Which means, to all of you
>
> Who are Lina Poletti
>
> (Schwartz, 2022, p. 6)

14 If at one level, then, the novel can be considered "an informal history of the emergence of modernism" (Bernstein Sycamore, 2023) these portraits also enable the author to broaden the reach of her palette and sketch out the contours of a far larger queer community, lending the novel as a whole a sense of seemingly infinite possibility across times and borders. As we will see later, the innovative form of this novel is all-important and part and parcel of the aesthetic quest it charts. Schwartz does not write a straight, linear biography, but creates what she herself describes as an "intrecciare" or "intertwining" of individual subtitled entries –fragments– that go together to form a network of brief passages (The Galley Beggar Q&A: Selby Wynn Schwartz, online). These short texts, for the most part vignettes of wayward female characters, with "sapphic" proclivities, are presented in roughly chronological in format, starting with the birth of Lina Poletti in 1885 and ending with *The Well of Loneliness* obscenity trial and the publication of *Orlando* in 1928. Interspersed between these entries are direct quotations from Sappho's poetry. Although organized into twenty numbered chapters completed with a prologue and afterward, the biofiction, in the image of the Sapphic fragment itself, is devoid of any explicit thematic narrative thread. Thus, just as Sap-

pho and her fragmented poetry offered Schwartz's artists a potentiality by which they could explore and express their emergent sexual identity, so too does *After Sappho* invite its reader, inspired by what they have read, to construct their own personal narrative of becoming: "My hope is that someone reading [this book] will say OK I see some part of this story I could take for myself and I will give it my kind of names" (The Shakespeare & Company Interview**,** 2022, 26:50). This relatability is also encouraged by the form of the framing narrative voice itself, a choric "we" of unnamed young women, vicarious participants in this moment of Sapphic élan, and the reader's humorous point of entry in the text: "Who was Sappho? No one knew but she had an island. She was garlanded with girls. She could sit down to dine and look straight at the woman she loved, however unhappily" ("SAPPHO, c. 630 BCE", Schwartz, 2022, p. 9). This narrative technique creates an immersive effect, the inclusivity of the first person plural soliciting the reader's involvement and identification.

The presence of Sapphic fragment in the text

15 The text's relationship with Sapphic verse is a complex one. Textually speaking, it inhabits the novel in myriad forms. Most obviously, the poetry is cited explicitly, accompanying and echoing the action of novel's protagonists, as for instance in the entry entitled "SAPPHO, FRAGMENT 31" where the reader learns how Lina Poletti wins over the affections of Sibilla Alermo, who in consequence deserts her male lover:

> The man who had been Sibilla's lover faded into a distingushed outline

> Sappho writes in Fragment 31 of the triangulations of lovers. The lover sits and watches while the beloved tuns her rapturous smile to someone else; now the new favorite moves close enough to touch her. *All is to be dared*, Sappho writes; then the poem breaks off ("SAPPHO, FRAGMENT 31", Schwartz, 2022, p. 42).

16 But her powerful images also invest the narrative in subtler ways, haunting the stories and creating a secret textual bond of female ex-

perience and kinship under patriarchy. For example Sappho's fragment 105, the simile of the woman married off against her will is first quoted directly "like the hyacinth in the mountains that shepherd men/ with their feet trample down" SAPPHO, FRAGMENTS 105A AND 105B", Schwartz, 2022, p. 15) and then immediately reworked to figure masculine culture's erasure of the lesbian poet: "An entire book of Sappho is made of wedding songs; like the hyacinth in the mountains, none have survived" ("SAPPHO, FRAGMENTS 105A AND 105B", Schwartz, 2022, p. 15) before resurfacing, seemingly unconsciously, in the words of narrative voice. This technique is used to striking effect when the text makes reference to the highly misogynist Italian Penal Code introduced at the moment of Italian unification: "In particular Article 544 of the Penal Code was like an iron lever, manoeuvring girls of sixteen into position as brides to the very men who had trampled them down" ("RINA PIERANGELI FACCIO 1893", Schwartz, 2022, p. 20). The Pisanelli code ruled that, at the word of her father, a violated daughter could be bound into becoming the wife of her aggressor reducing her to the status of helpless and hapless chattel submitted to the patriarchal regime. By reiterating the metaphor 'trample' of fragment 105 in her discussion of the code, Schwartz implicitly places the Italian law within a continuum of female oppression linking back to Sappho. Similarly, *Una donna* Sibilla Alermo's 1906 autobiography, is described as "the story of a woman whose mother goes out of the window in a white dress like a scrap of paper, whose body is trampled down like a hyacinth" ("SIBILLA ALERMO, UNA DONNA, 1906", Schwartz, 2022, p. 20). This many-layered intertextuality creates the impression, particularly in the opening chapters, that the entire text is imbued with the presence of Sappho's poetry, bearing transhistoric witness to female oppression under patriarchy and calling for women to break out from the bonds of the male estate. At the same time the text also bears witness to the potentially of a life of Sapphic in-betweeness. Just as, the narrative voice notes, one of the epithets attributed to Sappho was that of her body being a "darkly bright hollow" ("SAPPHO, FRAGMENT 147", Schwartz, 2022, p. 41), so do lesbians of the early twentieth century "liv[e] in a little hollow between laws" ("R, c. 1895", Schwartz, 2022, p. 32).

17 Moreover, as the polysemy of the "after" of the title suggests, the novel engages with the Greek poet's twin legacy for queer women,

writers, artists and readers alike. On the one hand, Schwartz charts her protagonists' desire to follow in Sappho's footsteps as they search their own sense of self –"At that time we were not called anything and so we cherished every word, no matter how many centuries dead" they say ("SAPPHO, c. 630 BCE", Schwartz, 2022, p. 10)–, and to nostalgically recreate a perceived halcyon past by writing "in the style of" their idol, by literally returning to the island of Lesbos, or failing that, hanging out at Nathalie Barney's *Temple de l'Amitié*. On the other hand, there is a questioning of what might come after Sappho, an awareness of the need to reinvent, to create new forms and new ways of expressing queer female selfhood in the twentieth century and beyond.

18 *After Sappho* is innovatively written in a first person plural "we". It is a choric "we" in the Greek sense of the term, a narrative form that gives a voice to those on the sidelines of the main modernist players, including Berthe Cleyrergue, Barney's maid (significantly the only protagonist allowed her own narrative voice, unfiltered by the choric we). Initially young, naïve and wistful, they gradually gain in agency and assurance, finding their own forms of self-expression and placing the focus on ongoing collective reading, recognition and reflection rather than simply celebrating the genius of individual creation and artistry. But the choric "we" also includes us, the readers, so the novel as Schwartz has explained in an interview "mak[es] room for people to possibly see themselves, little shards of themselves, little reflections of themselves, one little glimpse of themselves in someone else… a lot of possibilities all refracted'" (The Shakespeare and Company Interview, 2022, 25:48-50). The prose, which is unbeholden to dictates of realist verisimilitude, feels curiously atemporal, almost translated, as if traversing time and space. In short, *After Sappho* blurs the boundaries of (auto)biography and the novel, singular self and collaborative continuum and in so doing, functions to create a queer woman's literary and artistic lineage.

After Sappho as biofiction

19 A combination of fact and fiction, intellect and affect, the biofiction format is particularly suited to the author's purpose. This currently "flourishing genre appreciated by readers and critically successful on

the English-speaking literary scene" ~~is~~ popular not least, according to Monica Latham, because it allows for more "comfort" and "pleasure" she says than a "multitude of raw and arid" details served up in the traditional biography format. What is more, biofiction enables the writer-biographer to project their own imagination and desires into the narrative: "fiction also allows them to flirt with the truth, to fill in the gaps left by traditional biography" and like Roman and Greek myth writers in the past, contemporary biofictон writers tell the stories of the heroes of gods who captivate and intrigue them (Latham, 2017, p. 420-422). As Sharon O'Brien has argued, the narrative paradigm for traditional biography is the nineteenth–century realist novel, with its reliable chronological plotline and trustworthy narrator transparently relaying and ordering an accurate and intelligible reality peopled by rounded individuals (O'Brien, 1991, p. 125). In this sense biofiction surely owes its current popularity not only to the fact that it is fun and accessible, but also because it is a more appropriate form for the contemporary [post]postmodern age with its attendant suspicion of knowledge, since "at the heart of biofiction is manipulating truth [...] an understanding that corresponds to the contemporary view that absolute historical truth does not exist" (Latham, 2017, p. 422). Moreover, as many scholars have noted, (auto)biography traditionally showcased the life of the upper or middle-class man (Robinson, 1990, p.7) and set out to celebrate the consolidation of individual selfhood –or as Karl Weintraub put it in back in 1978, "each one of us constitutes one irreplaceable human form and we perceive a noble life task in the cultivation of our individuality, our ineffable self" (Weintraub, 1978, p. xiii). *After Sappho* challenges these traditional models of biography: it is written in a plural narrative voice and offers an expression of a collective but fragmented female experience rather than the consecration of one whole, atomized male subject; moreover, the narrative, marketed as a "novel" fully assumes its hybrid fact-fiction status and points to the very impossibility of biography as truth. These very contemporary reflections around the status and function of biography are also explicitly thematized within the text, notably around the life and writing of Virginia Woolf, figuring the sorry demise of the realist and biographical formats –patrilineal genres par excellence–, and charting the emergence of new queerer and more plural forms of life writing:

> VIRGINIA WOOLF, THE NEW BIOGRAPHY, 1927
>
> In the old lives, someone was born a boy, grew expeditiously into the proportions of a man, and set out to conquer his share of noteworthy deeds. In the middle chapters he might compose a treatise or announce the discovery of modern thought. When he had become eminent enough, he died
>
> We had all read those old lives; they were as dull and weighty as pewter tea platters. They were the stalwarts of all twenty-six volumes of Leslie Stephen's *Dictionary of National Biography* [...]
>
> Thus in her essay *The New Biography* Virginia Woolf expressed our desire for other lives. These new lives might be fuller, freer, by turns more rakish and more tender.[...]
>
> In these new lives, Virginia Woolf wrote, there would be that queer amalgamation of dream and reality we knew so intimately: it was the alchemy of our own existence ("VIRGINIA WOOLF, THE NEW BIOGRAPHY, 1927", Schwartz, 2022, p. 234-235).

20 In a similar vein, Schwartz also playfully opposes Radclyffe Hall's realist autofiction, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), with all its male hegemonic value-driven standards such as tradition and truth with Virginia Woolf's wayward "biography" of Vita Sackville-West, *Orlando*. Also published in 1928, Woolf's text constitutes an early example of biofiction and the template for a narrativization of queer female collective consciousness across the centuries:

> RADCLYFFE HALL, STEPHEN, 1927
>
> [...] In short, Stephen Gordon was not merely a queer sort of person but also a *gentleman*, Radclyffe Hall said to Natalie Barney, who sighed into her teacup
>
> RADCLYFFE HALL, TRUE REALISM IN FICTION, 1927

> Half of what passed as literature these days was not true, Radclyffe Hall objected [...] *True* realism in fiction, according to Radclyffe Hall, was a steadfast devotion to revealing the bare, literal and tragic. An English writer ought to stick to the form without wild-goose flights of fancy. There were proportions to respect, schema to follow. Fiction was as precise an art as changing francs into pounds sterling; only thereby might a treatise on sexology correctly be converted into a novel
>
> VIRGINIA WOOLF, *ORLANDO: A BIOGRAPHY*, 1928
>
> [...] This was a biography, the title announced. But it was also a novel, a whole fantasy, a view of two women at the top of a house, a talk on fiction and the future, a new biography, fragments of a sapphic poem, a composition as explanation, a heroically private joke, a series of portraits, a manifesto, an alcove in the history of literature, an alchemical experiment, an autobiography and a long piece of life from now. (Schwartz, 2020, p. 241, 243).

21 As Schwartz reminds us, Woolf initially described *Orlando* as "suggestions for short pieces" (Schwartz, 2020, p. 238), a format that clearly resonates with the structure of *After Sappho*, just as it echoes the fragmented nature of Sapphic verse. As we have seen, the incompleteness of the Sapphic fragment enabled the early twentieth century women to write themselves into a matrilineal literary continuum. However, Schwartz's text also speaks of the need to go beyond Sappho in the quest for artistic innovation:

> CASSANDRA, 1919
>
> [...] We who had come after Sappho would now go onwards
>
> From her fragments would emerge our new and modern forms
>
> There would be a future for the mood we lived in
>
> No longer would we follow in the style of, wistful and optative.
>
> Now Sappho was going to become us.

> We were going to happen to Sappho
>
> And Sappho would never be the same. (Schwartz, 2022, p. 170)

22 In this way, the gaps between entries in Schwartz's text also invite her contemporary reader to make new connections and create new narratives of womanhood ("new and modern forms") on the strength of this powerful and alluring matrilineage. Just as Sappho was appropriated and re-fashioned, taken up and re-embedded by the choric "we" of the narrative voice, so too does Schwartz extend the authorship of her text to include not only the artists and authors who have inspired her modern form of biofictional mythmaking but the readers themselves, who in their turn write themselves into its ongoing cultural legacy. This perspective is made explicit in Schwartz's concluding entry, which riffs on Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and solicits a collaborative, transhistoric experience of queer female being:

> Yet if you can lock the door to your room, you might try writing the story of Chloe and Olivia yourselves. The first thing is to change their names so that the story will feel like your own
>
> ("VIRGINIA WOOLF, WOMEN AND FICTION, 1928", Schwartz, 2022, p.252).

23 As Monica Latham convincingly argues, "biofiction constitutes our modern myths: the mythmaking process depends on the extraordinary stories of the historical figures and the writer biographer's ability to combine fact and fiction" (Latham, 2017, p. 422). In *After Sappho*, Selby Wynn Schwartz revisits a constellation of literary and artistic lesbian luminaries from the early twentieth century, themselves, like the author, under the sway of Sappho's arresting yet elusive verse. But her queer, female biofiction has nothing of the hagiographic or nostalgic about it: in the image of the narrative choric "we" of her novel, Schwartz gives us stories of other women's lives that can help us to invent or reinvent our own as she nourishes and perpetuates an alluring lesbian literary lineage.

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NOTES

1 My emphasis.

2 The latter of which were particularly appreciated by Woolf and H.D (Ribeyrol, 2009, p. 207-208).

3 "Les pièces grecques ne passent plus, les pièces lesbiennes pas encore!" Translation by Amy D. Wells.

4 For example, "women who want[ed] to do things or be people beyond the scope of their expected destiny" (Hanscombe & Smyers, 1987, p. xv).

5 Christened Cordula, she took the name of Lina, meaning light.

RÉSUMÉS

Français

After Sappho (2022), une biofiction de Selby Wynn Schwartz revisite le moment artistique et littéraire moderniste, plus particulièrement sa constellation de femmes artistes et écrivains pionnières. Comme son titre l'indique, le roman célèbre la figure de Sappho, qui a suscité un intérêt renaissant au

tournant du vingtième siècle et dont l'œuvre était source d'inspiration importante pour bon nombre de femmes artistes et écrivaines modernistes, leur permettant à leur tour de « renaître ». À la fois sur les traces de leur muse captivante, tout en s'en détachant, ces femmes s'inscrivent dans une généalogie personnelle et artistique au-delà des limites du patriarcat. Cependant, After Sappho n'offre pas un simple regard nostalgique vers un âge d'or d'émancipation féminine mais il participe d'une réflexion sur ce que pourrait être l'écriture d'une biographie féminine queer et sur la manière dont un tel projet pourrait s'inscrire dans la création d'une lignée et d'une communauté littéraires lesbiennes.

English

After Sappho (2022), a biofiction by Selby Wynn Schwartz revisits the artistic and literary modernist moment and its constellation of trailblazing women artists and writers. In particular and as its title suggests, the novel celebrates the figure and works of Sappho, both of which were enjoying a renaissance around the turn of the twentieth century, and which provided a key source of inspiration for many lesbian women modernists, enabling them, in their turn to be "reborn." Both following in the steps of, and going beyond, their captivating muse, the women thus inscribed themselves in a personal and artistic genealogy beyond the bounds of patriarchy. But After Sappho is not nostalgic looking backwards to a halcyon age of female emancipations; rather it offers a reflection on what it is to write queer, female biography and how such a project might, in itself, contribute to the creation of lesbian literary lineage and community.

Español

After Sappho (2022), una bioficción de Selby Wynn Schwartz, vuelve a visitar el momento artístico y literario modernista, más concretamente su constelación de mujeres artistas y escritoras pioneras. Como su título lo sugiere, la novela celebra la figura de Safo, que conoció un verdadero renacimiento a principios del siglo XX y cuya obra fue una importante fuente de inspiración para muchas mujeres artistas y escritoras modernistas, permitiéndoles que, a su vez, "renacieran". Siguiendo los pasos de su cautivadora musa, y rebasándolos, estas mujeres forman parte de una genealogía personal y artística más allá de los límites del patriarcado. Sin embargo, After Sappho no ofrece una simple mirada nostálgica hacia una época dorada de emancipación femenina, sino que participa de una reflexión sobre qué sería escribir una biografía femenina queer y cómo un proyecto así podría encajar en la creación de un linaje literario y una comunidad lésbica.

INDEX

Mots-clés

Schwartz, S.W., Sappho, lesbianisme, modernisme, biofiction

Keywords
Schwartz, S.W., Sappho, Lesbianism, Modernism, biofiction

Palabras claves
Schwartz, S.W., Safo, Lesbianismo, Modernismo, bioficción

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