A Passionate, Virginal Chapel, Moving Us to Kneel:

Marian Iconography and Lesbian Desire in Select Works by Romaine Brooks and Renée Vivien, 1900-1915

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ABSTRACT

A Passionate, Virginal Chapel, Moving Us to Kneel: Marian Iconography and Lesbian Desire in Select Works by Romaine Brooks and Renée Vivien, 1900-1915.

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This thesis examines a select group of works by the poet Renée Vivien (née Pauline Tarn, 1877-1909) and the painter Romaine Brooks (1874-1970) created between the years 1900 and 1915. Catholic iconography, and in particular Madonna figures, reoccur in both of their works from this period. While their work is part of a longer lineage of Decadent artists using Catholic iconography, and indeed, the influence of the Decadent movement is seen in both women's work, in this thesis I argue that their use of Marian iconography enabled Brooks and Vivien to confront heternoromative, patriarchal ideals and express lesbian desire, and to work through their complex relationships to their mothers. Using a queer Freudian psychoanalytic lens, drawn especially from Teresa de Lauretis' positive reading of Sigmund Freud's theories on perversion, I suggest that Vivien and Brooks' mothers inscribed a narcissistic wound on their daughters which continued to affect their adult relationships with women, and this is expressed through the works I discuss. However, these are also works which explicitly depict lesbian desire, and their use of Marian iconography is linked with both of these ideas. The complex nature of these works therefore reflects how Brooks and Vivien were using their work to address issues within their own psyche, while simultaneously they are an attempt to envision a society in which lesbian desire was not only accepted, but celebrated.

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Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century in Paris, there was a community of women artists and writers creating work that celebrated womanhood and non-heterosexual desire. In this thesis, I perform a queer-Freudian psychoanalytic reading of a selection of works by poet Renée Vivien (née Pauline Tarn, 1877-1909) and painter Romaine Brooks (1874-1970). Specifically, I focus on the use of a perverse Marian iconography in Vivien's 1904 novella *A Woman Appeared to Me* and in two of Romaine Brooks' works, *Spring* (1912) and *La trajet* (1911). Although Vivien and Brooks ran in the same circles and were briefly lovers, their work has yet not been brought into conversation, despite what I observe are similarities in their practices. Both women used a perverse form of Catholic Marian iconography drawn from the Decadent Movement to create work that expressed lesbian desire, while also allowing them to work through their complex relationships to their mothers and to motherhood more broadly.

Using the work of queer theorists, most notably Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Roof, I show how their use of Marian figures gestures towards both women's complicated relationships with their own mothers and the effect this had on their sexual relationships with other women, while simultaneously allowing them to propose a backwards-looking vision of the future that rejected patriarchal, heteronormative ideals. I first provide an overview of Sigmund Freud's theories of homosexuality, focusing on his 1905 work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, before showing how theorists such as de Lauretis and Roof rework these theories. I then provide a brief biography of Vivien and Brooks, focusing on their relationships with their mothers. The second section "Catholicism & The Decadent Movement," looks at the Decadent movement of

the late nineteenth century[1] and the complicated relationship many artists and writers within this movement had to Catholicism. I look at the large influence this had on both women's work, and how their usage of those forms differed from earlier artists and writers. The third section, "Marian Iconography & Lesbian Desire," looks at the meaning of Marian iconography specifically in the aforementioned works by Brooks and Vivien. In the fourth section, "Virginity & Virgin Mothers," I show how their use of Marian iconography is linked to discourses around virginity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, in my conclusion "Towards a Lesbian-Centric Future," I highlight how Vivien and Brooks used their work to propose a vision for society that celebrated lesbian desire, while also looking at the problematic elements of this vision.

Throughout this text, I will be using the term "lesbian" to refer to Vivien's and Brooks' sexualities and their relationships with other women. This is not to say that this is definitively how the women identified, as neither woman ever explicitly referred to herself as such. Indeed, while it is most likely that Vivien and Brooks, like Natalie Clifford Barney, considered themselves to be lesbians[2], there is no definitive "proof" of this identification. However, I agree with Martha Vicinus' argument that the contemporary term "lesbian" can stand in for a collection of terms, like "sapphist" and "invert," that have been used historically to describe "attachments between women" at different moments in history. Additionally, and perhaps more significantly, Vicinus suggests that lesbian is a useful term when discussing women who may not

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[1] The Decadent Movement is generally understood as having lasted from the 1880s until the mid-1890s, with the writer Oscar Wilde's trial and subsequent imprisonment for "gross indecency" in 1895 marking the end of the movement. See: Ruth Z. Temple, "Truth in Labelling: Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, Decadence, Fin de Siècle," *English Literature in Translation, 1880-1920* 17, no. 4 (1976).

[2] Suzanne Rodriguez, *Wild Heart: A Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002): 183.

have identified as such because it "asserts the fact of sex."[3] When discussing figures such as Vivien and Brooks, who we know with absolute certainty sought out sexual relationships with other women, the specificity of the term "lesbian" makes explicit those relationships and desires, and "provides boundaries to a subject that at times seems in danger of disappearing into such overbroad categories as 'queer' or 'nonnormative'."[4] Some scholars such as Jasmine Rault writing on figures such as those in Barney's circle opt to use the term "sapphic" to describe the relationships between some of these women as they may not have identified themselves as lesbians and their "rejection of hetero-femininity was importantly not yet reducible to a sexual identities" in the years leading up to Radclyffe Hall's obscenity trial.[5] In the current moment as well, "sapphic" has come to be "an umbrella term that includes lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual trans femmes, mascs, nonbinary folks, and cis women," and which "strives to conjure an experience more akin to an intention toward attraction — one oriented less to any specific gender identity and more to the fullness of a potential lovers' humanity."[6] There is no doubt that Vivien and Brooks were sexually attracted to women and pursued sexual relationships with women, and they may have considered themselves lesbians or otherwise homosexual, as Barney did. For this reason, while I will occasionally use the term "sapphic" when referring to the broader community of women with which Brooks and Vivien were associated, I use the term "lesbian" when referring to their desires and relationships, except when quoting from other sources.

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[3] Martha Vicinus, "The History of Lesbian History," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 567.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Jasmine Rault, "Designing Sapphic Modernity," *Interiors* 1, no. 1 (2010): 31.
[6] Yasmine Hamou, "What Does it Mean to Be Sapphic?" *them.*, April 27, 2022, https://www.them.us/story/what-does-sapphic-mean

Methodology

In Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*[7], he explores how a person develops their sexuality. The genital drive, that is, the libido, is described as having both a "sexual object" and a "sexual aim." The former refers to "the person from whom the attraction on the other sex emanates," and the latter, to the "action impelled by the drive."[8] The sexual object comes about through the individual's "object-choice," which begins to cement itself during puberty, but this is a process that begins in childhood. The primary sexual object is the child's mother, who provides them with the original "sexual object outside the infant's own body." This object is their mother's breast, as "the first sexual satisfaction" is the nourishment she provides."[9] However, while I am using non-gendered terms here, and despite Freud's own use of neutral terms throughout the text, Freud's focus is on male sexuality. As such, the child he refers to can be assumed to be a boy, while "the girl is assimilated to a male model, [and] male history."[10] While Freud suggests that the primary sexual object is the same for all children, he later notes that when puberty begins, "the primary inclination is the child's sexual stirrings toward the parents…the son being drawn toward the mother and the daughter toward the father."[11] Elsewhere in *Three Essays*, Freud explains that homosexuality is considered an "inversion," resulting in part from the improper object-choice.[12] While there is little in the text about what this means for female homosexuality (or even female sexuality more generally), it is clear that the improper object-choice for a woman is another woman: her mother. Why she

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[7] Subsequent references to this title in text will be shortened as *Three Essays*.
[8] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition,* trans. Ulrike Kistner, ed. Philippe Van Haute and Herman Westerink (London: Verso Press, 2016): 1.
[9] Ibid., 73.
[10] Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (London: MacMillan Press, 1982): 69.
[11] Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition* (2016): 76.
[12] Ibid., 79

would not be drawn towards the mother, as she would have been given the same "unending source of sexual excitement and satisfaction" by the mother's care as a male child would, is not made clear.[13] This notion of the object-choice is expanded upon in later works, such as "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in A Woman,"[14] which was first published in 1920. In this text, Freud makes it explicit that for the young woman being analysed in "Psychogenesis," the women she has been attracted to had been "a substitute for her mother," and were often young mothers themselves. He is also quick to point out that the current object of her affection, who was not a young mother and was of "bad repute," physically resembled her older brother, whose genitalia forced her to discover her own imagined "castration" as a young child.[15] While the details in this specific case are "meagre" due to this analyses having been broken off after a short period,[16] genital comparison is a recurring feature in Freud's writing. Typically, this comparison is the "sight of a phallic presence in the boy, sight of a phallic absence in the girl, [and] ultimately sight of a phallic absence in the mother," and as "the penis, according to Freud, is more visible than what the little girl has… in other words better, superior."[17] For girls, in "normal" (heterosexual) development, this discovery results in the development of the "castration complex," which "ensures the girl's repudiation of the first love object (the mother)," who she rejects due to her lack of a penis and her failure to provide her with a penis, "in favour of a heterosexual object (the father) and his symbolic substitute (penis = baby)."[18] While the patient in "Psychogenesis" has remained fixated on her mother, her choice of

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[13] Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition* (2016): 74.
[14] Subsequent references to this title in text will be shortened as "Psychogenesis."
[15] Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in A Woman," in *Freud on Women: A Reader*, ed. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991): 250-251.
[16] Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in A Woman," (1991): 250.
[17] Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (1982): 27.
[18] Mary Jacobus, "Russian Tactics: Freud's 'Case of Homosexuality in a Woman'," in *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 199): 47.

object is still related to (desire for) the father. When she was a teenager, and therefore "experiencing the revival of her infantile Oedipus complex," her mother became pregnant.[19] This, according to Freud, caused her to resent her father because she "desired her *father's* child and an image of *him*," and therefore "repudiated her wish for a child, her love of men, and the feminine role in general" as a result of her jealousy over her mother's pregnancy.[20] While Freud does note a few theoretical explanations for the patient's object choice that do not involve the father, it is made clear that the father would/should have been her object-choice had this incident not happened.[21]

Although Freud's understanding of female homosexuality is limited and oftentimes problematic, his work is useful for understanding the context in which Vivien and Brooks were working. Brooks had read Freud, as had Natalie Clifford Barney[22], and there is reasonable potential in assuming that Vivien was familiar with his work in the years prior to her death. Additionally, the notion of the mother as the lesbian's object-choice has been further developed by queer theorists in ways that can be useful in understanding the role of Marian figures in the work of both Brooks and Vivien. In the Western world, the Virgin Mary is the mother par excellence, but her appearance in these women's works is often perverse, and always without a child. Borrowing from Carolyn Allen's discussion of Djuna Barnes' novel *Nightwood* (1936), I show that by depicting their lovers as Marian figures, they are "figuring mother-child positions as part of [their] lesbian erotics and… 'disfiguring' the hegemonic positions these erotics delineate."[23]

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[19] Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in A Woman," (1991): 252.
[20] Ibid., 252-253.
[21] Ibid., 252.
[22] Cassandra Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015): 142.
[23] Carolyn Allen, "Djuna Barnes: The Erotics of Nurture," in *Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996): 29.

In this thesis, I explore the possibility of maternal figures as erotic figures for lesbian women. However, I am hesitant to ascribe this eroticism to "a 'homosexual factor' or a 'homosexual-maternal' latent in every woman," as this notion is problematic in several ways. As outlined by Teresa de Lauretis in her text *The Practice of Love*, the idea of an innate "homosexual maternal" runs the risk of reducing women's sexuality to maternity, and also ignores the fact of "lesbianism as a particular relation between women that is not only sexual but also sociosymbolic."[24] Judith Roof posits that it is not the mother herself that is the catalyst for the development of a lesbian sexuality, but rather the lack of a mother. Although the examples she provides of this phenomenon in her chapter are lesbian characters from novels whose mothers are fully absent from their daughters' lives, the experiences she describes can also be applied to lesbians who really existed, i.e. Brooks and Vivien, and whose mothers may have been physically present, but certainly emotionally absent. In both cases, "the absence of the mother is a displacement of the loss of the mother's desire," referring to the desire for a daughter, "which is displaced again into the daughter's desire for an unfulfillable desire."[25] de Lauretis largely rejects the notion that the mother is the lesbian's pre-Oedipal object-choice, instead positing a scenario in which it is the lack of the mother's love which causes the daughter to seek out other women. It is not that she desires the mother's love, but rather that in the absence of that love, and in being "narcissistically wounded" by that absence, she desires a woman who is "embodied and self-possessed as a woman," therefore allowing herself to feel that she can overcome her wound.[26] If the relation to the mother is "one of loss and lack," then the

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[24] Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994): 198.
[25] Judith Roof, *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 116.
[26] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, (1994): 249.

desire for another woman "is made possible by the disavowal of that lack."[27] In the next section, I show how Vivien and Brooks were wounded by the absence of their mother's love. Their use of Marian iconography, an iconography that is inherently linked to motherhood, allows them to acknowledge and disavow this lack in various ways.

[27] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, (1994): 250.

Pauline Mary Tarn & Beatrice Romaine Goddard

Renée Vivien was born Pauline Mary Tarn on June 11, 1877, in Paddington, England [Figure 1]. Her father, John Tarn, was English, while her mother, Mary Gillet Bennett, was American. Vivien was their first child, and her sister, Harriet Antoinette Tarn, who was most often called Antoinette, was born in 1881. The family moved to Paris in 1878, and remained there until the death of John in 1886, which is most commonly believed to have been from a respiratory illness.[28] It is likely that this is where Vivien began her education, although there are few details of what that education entailed. One of her biographers, Karla Jay, suggests that Vivien likely received very little formal education and rather "read haphazardly whatever she chanced upon in the libraries of family members or of friends" while being taught French by a governess.[29] It was also during this time in Paris that Vivien met Mary (1878-1938) and Violet Shillito (1877-1901), who were to become lifelong friends of hers.

There is scant biographical information available on the Shillito family. Violet is primarily discussed in biographies of her more famous friends, such as Vivien, Natalie Clifford Barney, and another American heiress, Mable Dodge Luhan, while Mary is further reduced to Violet's less intellectual younger sister.[30] The Shillitos were a wealthy American family, and the father, Gordon Shillito, was part of "a great firm of Cincinnati merchants," and served as their representative in Paris.[31] They began residing in Paris permanently sometime in the early 1880s, in the same building as the Tarns, and it is there that Vivien and Violet met and began their lifelong friendship.[32] Prior to this, the family had lived in Cincinnati, and had been neighbours to

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[28] Karla Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988): 5.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Rodriguez, *Wild Heart: A Life* (2002): 107.
[31] Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Intimate Memories, Volume One* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2015): 346.
[32] Rodriguez, *Wild Heart: A Life* (2002): 106.

the Barney family.[33] Violet and Mary's childhood friendships with both Vivien and Barney would be the catalyst for the women meeting. I discuss Vivien's relationship with Violet in more detail later in this thesis, as she is significant for understanding Vivien's turn to Catholicism.

Sometime shortly after John Tarn's death, the family returned to London. Although it seems that Vivien felt her whole childhood had been an unhappy one[34], it was at this time that her relationship with her mother severely deteriorated. Vivien claimed that her mother psychologically tormented her following John's death. This was allegedly done with the intention of Vivien being institutionalised (or, having her commit suicide), therefore causing her to lose the inheritance from her father that she would receive upon reaching the age of majority. The inheritance would then go to her mother instead, who was not independently wealthy. After Vivien took an overdose of her sleeping medication in her late teenage years, her mother attempted to have her institutionalised, as she believed that this had been a deliberate suicide attempt. This attempt at forced institutionalisation eventually became a court case.[35] Some of the specific events described by Vivien, such as her attempting to throw herself in the Thames as a result of her mother's torments only to be saved by a kindly maid, have been doubted by biographers.[36] However, Vivien was undisputedly emancipated from her mother's control as a result of this legal battle, and lived as a ward of the court until she turned twenty-one, the age of majority at the time, and could therefore receive her inheritance. Up until that point, she was required to remain in England, as part of the court's ruling. During this time, in what Suzanne Rodriguez suggests was an attempt to "please her mother," Vivien was officially presented to

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[33] Rodriguez, *Wild Heart: A Life* (2002): 104.
[34] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 5.
[35] Rodriguez, *Wild Heart: A Life* (2002): 107.
[36] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 7.

Queen Victoria and her court when she was twenty years old.[37] By the next year however, she would wholly reject English society and end her life as Pauline Tarn, and would begin her rebirth as Renée Vivien in France.

It does appear that Vivien rebuilt the relationship with her mother later in her adult life, although the specifics of how this came to be are unknown. Jay suggests that her mother's remarriage to another wealthy man was a factor here.[38] The pair were never fully estranged, as evidenced by Vivien's presentation at court per her mother's request while living as a ward of the court. However, this relationship remained fraught. In one letter to her younger sister Antoinette, dated May 1909, Vivien states that "when you ask me to reconcile myself with Mother, I'm sorry to say you are asking of me a physical impossibility." In the same letter, she explains that "were I on my death-bed, I could not love her nor want her near me, but only feel for her a cold shivering horror."[39] As this letter is dated only six months before Vivien's untimely death, it seems unlikely that her feelings changed during the rest of her life.

Romaine Brooks grew up in a similarly difficult environment [Figure 2]. Born Beatrice Romaine Goddard on May 1, 1874 in Rome to an American family, Brooks was the youngest of three children. She had an older sister, Mary Aimée, who went by Maya, and a brother, St. Mar, who was the middle child. They were primarily raised by their mother Ella Waterman Goddard, as their father, Major Harry Goddard, left the family shortly after Romaine's birth and remained absent for nearly all of Brooks' life.[40] Brooks' description of her childhood, which she recounted

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[37] Rodriguez, *Wild Heart: A Life* (2002): 107

[38] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 7.

[39] Renée Vivien to Harriet Antoinette Tarn, May 14, 1909, in *Renée Vivien, une femme de lettres entre deux siècles (1877-1909),* ed. Nicole G. Albert and Brigitte Rollet *(*Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), 140.

[40] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 213.

in great detail in her unpublished memoir *No Pleasant Memories*, reads like something out of a Gothic novel. Her mother, who was likely suffering from a mental illness, greatly favoured her only son over her daughters. When St. Mar was eleven (Brooks would have been three years old), he developed scarlet fever, and once he had recovered from the illness, alleged that "God and various saints were molesting him." He too showed signs of an unspecified mental illness and began experiencing "fits" that would affect him for the rest of his life.[41] From the age of six on, Brooks was essentially abandoned by Ella, and spent her childhood shuffled between various locations. This included a private Episcopalean boarding school, St. Mary's Hall, in New Jersey from 1883 to 1886[42], an unnamed Northern Italian convent school from 1887 until late 1889 or early 1890[43], and finally, Mademoiselle Tavan's Private Finishing School for Young Girls in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1891 to 1895.[44] In the intermittent years, she travelled throughout France and Italy with her mother and brother. During the time she spent with them, she was made to put up with not only her mother's "complete unpredictability,"[45] but with her being one of the few people who St. Mar relied on for emotional fulfilment. Finally, in 1895, at the age of twenty-one, Brooks "decided to strike out on her own, without notifying her mother" and, like Vivien would three years later, she moved to Paris.[46] She would remain on her own until December 1901, when she was informed of St. Mar's death at the age of thirty-four, from either pneumonia or kidney disease.[47] Although they had not spoken in six years beyond a handful of terse letters, Brooks returned to her mother, who was then living in Nice and who "had changed

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[41] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 20.
[42] Ibid., 25.
[43] Ibid., 26.
[44] Ibid., 28.
[45] Meryle Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks,* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974): 18.
[46] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 30.
[47] Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (1974): 27.

into a grieving, demented old woman surrounded by mementos of her dead son."[48] In November 1902, Ella died, and allegedly "used her last breath to try and ask for her daughter's forgiveness," although Brooks never stated how she responded.[49] Almost the entirety of her estate was split between Brooks and Maya, making the now twenty-eight year old Brooks exceedingly wealthy.[50] She settled in Capri, where she began her artistic practice in earnest as she no longer had to worry about making a living. In 1903, she married her friend, John Ellingham Brooks, who was also homosexual. However, the marriage ended up being wildly unpleasant and did not last a year - it is not even mentioned in her memoirs, despite Brooks having kept his last name. Although she would regularly return to Capri for the rest of her life, it was in the aftermath of her marriage and hasty divorce (and a very brief stay in London) that she began living and establishing her career in Paris.

Brooks also gave birth to a daughter of her own. Using records from the Archives de Paris, the historian Melanie Hawthorne discovered that a woman named Beatrice Goddard, aged twenty-one, gave birth to a child named Jeanne-Louise on February 17, 1896.[51] The father, per the birth certificate, was unnamed rather than *inconnu*, indicating that Brooks knew who the father was but chose not to name him. Although this information was not yet confirmed when Cassandra Langer's recent biography of Brooks was released, she acknowledges the possibility of Brooks' pregnancy, and presents a man named Alexander Hamilton Phillips as the likely father. Phillips was not only her sister Maya's husband at the time, but he had also previously courted her

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[48] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 38.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Melanie C. Hawthorne, "When You Cannot Run, You Cannot Hide: Romaine Brooks Draws (On) The Past," *Romance Studies* 34, no. 1 (2016): 17-18.

mother.[52] He and Brooks were in contact as she was using Phillips and Maya as a go-between to request an allowance from her mother, and Langer suggests that he likely took advantage of her desperate situation, as Brooks had been living in near-poverty.[53] According to records from a maternity hospital where Jeanne-Louise was cared for after her birth, "the mother… 'refused to take her'" and the child was eventually put in the care of the state, until her death from broncho-pneumonia on August 16, 1896.[54] Brooks' first biographer, Meryle Secrest, presents several scenarios regarding the then-rumour of her pregnancy. The first scenario, which is the closest to what actually happened, concludes five years later with Brooks attempting to reclaim the child once she has received her inheritance, and after she has married John Ellingham Brooks.[55] This claim is confirmed by Hawthorne, who cites letters from both John and Romaine to the Assistance publique in Paris regarding the status of a "child abandoned in 'spring' of 1896 by her mother."[56] By the end of September 1903, Brooks had received confirmation of Jeanne-Louise's death.[57]

Both Vivien and Brooks felt that their mothers preferred their siblings to them. Vivien felt that her mother preferred her sister, Antoinette, because she was prettier and more feminine than herself, and she was not rebellious in the way that Vivien was.[58] Like Stephen Gordon, the protagonist of Radclyffe Hall's seminal lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* on whom de Lauretis bases much of her analysis, she lacks the body which her mother desires, causing her to

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[52] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 32.
[53] Ibid., 33.
[54] Hawthorne, "When You Cannot Run, You Cannot Hide," (2016): 17-18.
[55] Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (1974): 23.
[56] Hawthorne, "When You Cannot Run, You Cannot Hide," (2016): 17-18.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 6.

be cut off from her mother's love. For Brooks, her mother openly stated her preference for St. Mar over her two daughters, and she was extremely aware of the lasting effects her mother's abuse had on her. Her unpublished memoir opens with the statement that "to be caught in the vicious circle of another's life is to revolve perilously in another's perils."[59] Just as Vivien's mother's desire for a prettier, more feminine daughter inscribed a narcissistic wound on her, we can understand Brook's mother's preference for her son in a similar way. This scene can certainly be understood in straightforward Freudian terms: the mother desires the phallus, she prefers the son because of his phallus and resents the daughter for her lack of one, and the daughter therefore wishes to be/possess the phallus, by becoming masculine.[60] That Brooks is often seen as being a near-stereotypical masculine/mannish lesbian adds to this straightforward narrative. Langer suggests that the relationship between Brooks and Ella was part of a "painful emotional triangle," as "Ella loved St. Mar, who loved Romaine, who wanted her mother's love."[61] Brooks claimed that Ella would not only dress her in St. Mar's old clothing, which Secrest notes is "a symbolic act whose unconscious message is, 'You would be better in you were a boy',"[62] but that she would also do things such as haphazardly chop off her hair with scissors, which Brooks felt was a deliberate attempt to make her uglier than her brother.[63] However, returning to de Lauretis' analysis, Brooks' masculinity can be read as a deliberate use of signifiers which carry "a strong connotation of sexual desire for the female body."[64] Perhaps not insignificantly, Brooks cut her hair short and purchased her first suit not long after receiving

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[59] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
[60] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994): 241.
[61] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 26.
[62] Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (1974): 31.
[63] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 22.
[64] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994): 243.

her inheritance from her mother's death. In the case of both Brooks and Vivien, although they expressed their desire for women in varying ways, this desire can be understood as such: "I cannot love myself, because the (M)Other does not love me…I want another to love me, and to love me sexually…This lover must be a woman, and not a faulty woman, dispossessed of her body (like me), but a woman embodied and self-possessed as a woman, as I would want to be and can become only with her love."[65] As I will show, this fantasy of desire was reflected in both women's usage of Marian iconography.

Although I am not discussing any works by Natalie Clifford Barney, her relationship with Vivien forms the basis of *A Woman Appeared to Me*, and their relationship was crucially significant to Vivien in the years of her life that I cover in this thesis. As such, it is necessary to introduce her in this section, before beginning my analysis of Vivien's work. Barney was born on October 31, 1876 to Albert Clifford Barney and Alice Pike Barney in Dayton, Ohio [Figure 3]. Barney and Vivien first met in 1899, when they were introduced by Violet and Mary Shillito, who had been childhood friends of Barney before their family had moved to France. Although both women had had relationships with other women previously, Jay refers to this meeting as "love at first sight."[66] In each other, they found a kindred spirit, and although their relationship was often tempestuous, it enabled a period of extreme creative productivity and helped each woman to develop their vision of an idealised, woman-centred society.[67]

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[65] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994): 249.
[66] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 9.
[67] Ibid., 11.

In her memoirs, Barney would state that Vivien had "in her a christian [sic] soul ignorant of its own nature."[68] However, she does not connect Vivien's Christian soul to her description of an early and highly significant moment in their relationship: the first time that Vivien and Barney slept together in the former's *pension*. According to Barney, Vivien sought to make her room "worthy" of her lover by filling it with white lilies, a flower which Vivien devoted to her. Barney describes the room as being so filled with lilies that "their whiteness lit up the dark corners of the room," and "transform[ed] that rather ordinary room into a passionate, virginal chapel, moving us to kneel - she before me, I before her."[69] Barney's wry reference to "kneeling" evokes prayer, heightening the religious overtones of the scene, but the act she refers to is almost certainly cunnilingus. While Vivien devoted the lily to Barney, white lilies are also a symbol of the Virgin Mary in Catholic iconography, and are sometimes referred to as "madonna lilies." The Virgin Mary has been depicted with these flowers, which represent both spiritual and sexual purity, since at least the Middle Ages. In the nineteenth-century, religious artists were "cautioned… to omit the stamens from lilies in paintings of Mary, thereby creating a purely feminine symbol, with its remaining sexuality, the plant's ovary, discreetly hidden."[70] Significantly, and conversely, the lily was also associated with the male homosexual aesthetes of the late nineteenth century. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) would wear lilies, in all of their "gaudy excess," as a way of "teasing the viewer's impetus towards gender categorization, loosening but not liberating men from the constraints of Victorian masculinity."[71] While Wilde would also adorn himself flowers such as sunflowers and the infamous green carnations, Frederick Roden argues that the lily is a

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[68] Natalie Clifford Barney, "Renée Vivien," in *A Perilous Advantage: The Best of Natalie Clifford Barney*, edited and translated by Anna Livia (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1992): 22.
[69] Ibid., 18.
[70] Annette Stott, "Floral Femininity: A Pictorial Definition," *American Art* 6, no. 2 (1992): 66.
[71] Talia Schaffer, "Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion: Wilde, Beerbohm, and the Male Aesthetes' Sartorial Codes," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 1 (2000): 44

particularly potent symbol because of its associations with the "Virgin Mary and hence Catholic Christianity," and therefore "it may be read as dandiacal excess, but it is also exemplary of the Aesthete's queer appropriation of religious symbol."[72] In the scene Barney describes, the lilies remain a virginal symbol, but imbued with eroticism. As I will discuss later in this paper, virginity and sex with women were completely compatible concepts for Vivien. This important moment in their relationship establishes the link between religious and sexual desire for Vivien.

[72] Frederick Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002): 84.

Catholicism and The Decadent Movement

Attitudes towards the Catholic Church in French and English society in the final decades of the nineteenth century were complex. Marion Thain notes that "puritan anti-Catholicism was particularly strong during the latter half of the nineteenth century when the Catholic Church was re- establishing itself in England,"[73] although this was just one moment in a much longer history of anti-Catholic sentiment in the country.[74] While Thain's work primarily focuses on England during this period, the years of the Third Republic in France (1870-1940) marked a similar shift in public opinion towards the Church, as "the secular programme began […] to remove the hold which anti-revolutionary, intransigent Catholicism had long had over French society."[75] In Western Europe more generally, there had also been "a scientific condemnation of Christianity …as an assault on reason and a hindrance to human progress," with one prominent French psychologist, Jean-Martin Charcot, going so far as to "diagnose early modern mystics as hysterics."[76] It is precisely this backlash to the Church, which involved accusations of "paganism, even hedonism" owing to the "sumptuousness of church vestments, chalices, altars, even the symbolic grandeur of the Mass itself [and] the sheer sensuality of its ritual, whether Anglo or Roman Catholic," which drew the artists and writers of the Decadent movement, and later Vivien and Brooks, to the Church.[77]

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[73] Marion Thain, "Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 230.
[74] Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997): 8.
[75] Kay Chadwick, introduction to *Catholicism, Politics, and Society in Twentieth Century France*, ed. Kay Chadwick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000): 2.
[76] Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (1997): 8.
[77] Ibid., 6.

When referring to the Decadent movement, I am particularly relying on Ellis Hanson's explanation of the term, as outlined in *Decadence and Catholicism*. He notes that the concept "overlaps both stylistically and historically with naturalism, romanticism, aestheticism, Pre-Raphaelitism, symbolism, impressionism, and modernism." He defines it "as a late-romantic movement in art and literature that raised the aesthetic dictum of 'art for art's sake' to the status of a cult, especially in the final decades of the nineteenth century."[78] The Decadent movement is often seen as highly misogynistic, and not without reason. Women are often depicted as lascivious femme fatales, and lesbians are further reduced to vampiric figures, lurking in the shadows and preying on innocent women.[79] The art historian Michelle Facos notes that in Decadent and Symbolist depictions of "women with angelic qualities," a category to which the Virgin Mary most assuredly belongs, such women are divided into two subcategories: the "sickly," who "pose no threat due to their weakness," and the "saintly," who "inspired men to illustrious achievements through their chaste and pious example."[80] It was possible to be both, and Facos uses the example of Ophelia here, but it was also possible to be sickly, and perhaps appear saintly, but remain a threatening figure to men. Perhaps the most significant example of this is Edvard Munch's 1895 lithograph *Madonna (Conception)*, in which the Madonna becomes a figure that affirms "female inferiority, vice, or both"[81] [Figure 4]. In contrast, Vivien and Brooks' sickly, perverse Marian figures are perhaps threatening to men, but they also are

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[78] Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (1997): 2.
[79] Recent scholarship, such as the work of French literary critic Nicole G. Albert, has sought to complicate this, by "studying the sexuality of this creature," the turn-of-the-century lesbian, "who challenged normative gender roles and crossed boundaries." See: Nicole G. Albert, *Lesbian Decadence: Representations in art and literature of fin-de-siècle France*, trans. Nancy Erber and William A. Penniston, (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2016).
[80] Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 117.
[81] Ibid: 121.

representations of lesbian desire. Using this mode of representation allows them to develop a female-centred vision for their own art, and for the future of women like them.

Vivien's poetry often drew from historical forms, most often either Sapphic verse or the extravagance of Decadent poetics. As Tama Lea Engelking has noted, her use of genre characteristics served to "inscribe her difference" as a lesbian writer "into otherwise recognizable forms."[82] Shari Benstock argues, in reference to Natalie Clifford Barney's poetry, that she deliberately chose to use what were already considered staid, old-fashioned forms of poetic expression at the turn of the century. In doing so, she was able to insert the "radical sentiments" of her explicitly lesbian poetry into a "long and respected tradition."[83] This same claim can be made of Vivien's poetry, in that her work shows the influence of literature ranging from the previous generation of Decadent poets, such as A.C. Swinburne and Charles Baudelaire,[84] to works from the "courtly love tradition,"[85] to Sapphic verse, even going so far as to include reworked lines from Sappho's verse in her own work.[86] Although her work, including *A Woman Appeared to Me*, relies on Decadent tropes by featuring characters such as a vampiric femme fatale and an Androgyne, she appropriates them into an explicitly lesbian narrative.[87] However, her alignment with the Decadent movement has been criticised by feminist critics such as Lillian Faderman, who argues that her use of poetic forms taken from an often deeply misogynistic

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[82] Tama Lea Engelking, "Decadence and the Woman Writer: Renée Vivien's *Une femme m'apparut*," in *A 'Belle Epoque'? Women in French Society and Culture 1890-1914*, ed. Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006): 226.
[83] Shari Benstock, "Natalie Barney: Rue Jacob," in *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 282.
[84] Cassandra Laity, "H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadence and Modernist Women's Writing." *Feminist Studies* 15, no. 3 (1989): 462.
[85] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 88.
[86] Ibid., 37.
[87] Engelking, "Decadence and the Woman Writer: Renée Vivien's *Une femme m'apparut*," (2006): 226.

genre of poetry is evidence of her self-hating nature.[88] This logic is also applied to her deathbed conversion to the Catholic faith, and to the nature of her death more broadly. Faderman explicitly links her poetry and interest in Decadent forms to these acts, stating that "her infatuation with the aesthete-decadent pose contribute to her death quite literally by encouraging her romantic aversion to light and air and supplying her with the idea of drinking eau de cologne."[89] This is an analysis that gives Vivien very little credit. It reduces complex mental illnesses such as anorexia and alcoholism to mere "poses," and makes no serious attempt to consider the root causes thereof.

Although it is ultimately impossible to know what Vivien's true intentions in converting were, I argue that there were two primary factors. Perhaps the most significant factor in the decision would have been Violet Shillito's own deathbed conversion, and the possibility of being reunited with her beloved friend in the Catholic afterlife. As I will show in the following section of this thesis, it is clear from *A Woman Appeared to Me* that Shillito's death had a profound effect on her, and that Vivien likely blamed herself for not going with Shillito to the South of France sooner. By converting, she could attempt to right some of these wrongs. In his writing on Catholic converts Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who were contemporary with Vivien and wrote similarly Sapphic poetry under the shared pseudonym "Michael Field," Roden has suggested that "to embrace Catholicism with passionate ecstasy could be effected only by death." In their case, it was the death of their beloved dog Whym Chow, and for Vivien, it was Shillito's death. Furthermore, their conversion was "based on loss, decay – Decadence."[90] The same can be said of Vivien's. I argue that the second reason, which is not wholly distinct from the first, was

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[88] Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, (New York: William Morrow, 1981): 361.
[89] Ibid: 363.
[90] Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (2002): 211.

Vivien's own understanding of Catholicism. Within turn-of-the-century discourse, the Catholic Church was seen as non-rational and sensual, which would have appealed to those brought up in "austere and rational Protestantism" with a bent towards mysticism.[91] In much of the writing on Vivien, there is an implicit suggestion that by converting to Catholicism, she was therefore embracing the Catholic Church, and all of its misogyny and homophobia, or that by converting, she was renouncing her past (lesbian) sins. Rather, as there was sadly no priest(ess) who could perform the last rites of her particular version of Catholicism, I suggest that Vivien was not giving up this vision, but was continuing to practise her particular form of religious passion in the way she saw best fit.

There is often an attempt made to separate Vivien's conversion from her earlier pagan tendencies, suggesting that the two desires cannot exist simultaneously. This difference is further emphasised by comparisons between her (pagan, sexual) desire for Barney, versus her (chaste, Christian) desire for Violet Shillito. It should be noted that there is evidence that Shillito had relationships with other women, including Mabel Dodge Luhan, although Luhan claimed that their romance, which likely occurred during their teenage years, "never went beyond gentle touching of each other's breasts."[92] With that being said, if her relationship with Vivien ever moved beyond a platonic (albeit deeply intimate) friendship, I have not yet found evidence of this. Drawing from Roof's conception of lesbian desire in narrative texts, I propose that it is not possible, or necessary, to read a single "trajectory" of desire into Vivien's life, in which I am including her religious desires. Rather, it seems more accurate to describe this path as "a transformation of their earlier 'pagan' Sapphism," to once again borrow from Roden's writing on

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[91] Jay, *The Amazon and the Page* (1988): 83.
[92] Lois Palken Rudnick, *The Suppressed Memoirs of Mabel Dodge Luhan: Sex, Syphilis, and Psychoanalysis in the Making of Modern American Culture* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2012): 31.

Michael Field.[93] These desires are not in conflict with one another, but are rather both examples of the "multiple shapes of desire" that would make up the "narrative" of Vivien's life.[94] In a letter to Barney following Shillito's death and their initial breakup, Vivien wrote that "je ne me repens pas de t'avoir aimée."[95] Her use of the term "repens" is telling - she is not attempting to atone for their relationship, and she does not regret it.

Despite her family not being Catholic, Brooks spent time as a young teenager at a convent school, and it was here that she began to draw a connection between Catholicism and Death that was made particularly explicit by the artists and writers of the Decadent Movement. The specific details Brooks gives about the school are difficult to verify, as she never gave the name of the school or the Mother Superior. However, she would describe the school itself as being a cold, dark stone building, where nuns died without warning and the elderly Mother Superior, who allegedly doted on Brooks, "was like an ogress in the fairy tales she had read at St. Mary's Hall."[96] Secrest suggests that prior to arriving at the convent, Brooks' vision of Catholicism would have been of "the teaching of St. Francis," and "the sunny cloisters she had seen, whose calm seemed to radiate divine inspiration,"[97] although it is not clear how or why she would have come to develop such an assumption. While her time at the convent was traumatic in some ways, it also enabled her to begin developing an aesthetic steeped in a "decadent fascination with death,

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[93] Frederick Roden, "Michael Field and the Challenges of Writing a Lesbian Catholicism," in *Michael Field and Their World*, ed. Margaret D. Stetz and Cheryl A. Wilson (High Wycombe, UK: The Rivendale Press, 2007): 157.
[94] Roof, *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (1991): 118.
[95] Renée Vivien to Natalie Clifford Barney, July 18, 1902, in *Correspondances croisées: Pierre Louys - Natalie Clifford-Barney - Renee Vivien*, ed. Jean-Paul Goujon (Muizon, France: A L'Ecart, 1983), 106.
[96] Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (1974): 65.
[97] Ibid., 64.

decay, and physical corruption."[98] As evidence of this, although Brooks seemed to have viewed her time at the convent school as incredibly negative, it was at the school that she began to adapt herself "as best as [she] could to a life of medieval Catholicism."[99] This continued to be a theme throughout her life, as shown by her self-identification as a *lapidé* (someone who was stoned to death, often associated with early Christian martyrs), her aesthetic preferences, and her tendency towards asceticism. Perhaps it is in light of these tendencies that she recounts a brief conversation with an elderly nun who she met shortly after leaving the convent. The nun supposedly asked Brooks "You did not want to become a Catholic? E peche[sic]?"[100] To this, she smiled but did not respond, thinking to herself that she is asking the same question.[101]

Like Vivien's poetry, Brooks' paintings are often seen as drawing on an old-fashioned, male-dominated (if not explicitly misogynistic) school of painting. Brooks wore her love of James McNeill Whistler's work proudly, and as Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace point out, her work "deliberately resurrected a visual language of decadence, decay, and corruption."[102] While they focus their discussion on her 1920s portraits, this descriptor certainly applies to her earlier works. However, as argued by Elliott and Wallace, it would be inaccurate to describe her work as merely imitative. Langer further argues that while Brooks disliked most Modern art and sought to "create her own forms exclusive of the impulses of abstract and nonobjective art," her

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[98] Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses? Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, and the 'originality of the avant-garde'," in *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings*, (London: Routledge, 1994): 42.
[99] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
[100] This is a misspelling of "E perché?" which translates to "And why?"
[101] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
[102] Elliott + Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses?" (1994): 43.

"development of a heroic feminine that focused on single female figures set against simplified backgrounds" was distinctly modern.[103] However, this too points towards an issue raised by Elliott and Wallace, that representational art, particularly that which addresses "'feminine' issues," is still viewed as negative and "less-than" non-representational modes of art.[104] Rather than attempting to argue for the modernity of Vivien and Brooks' works, I instead argue that the Decadent movement's value to them was the preexisting explorations of "maternal eros, androgyny [and] lesbianism," which would allow them to "articulate a spectrum of desires" that did not otherwise have an outlet.[105]

Brooks' and Vivien's usage of Marian iconography and their working within "outdated" styles are linked. As Elliot and Wallace argue, earlier critics often understood the latter decision as the women creating work that was simply derivative of earlier male artists and writers[106], or in the more extreme case of Vivien, as being evidence of a deeply-rooted self-loathing and internalised homophobia.[107] Indeed, in a recent example, curator Jonathan D. Katz argued in his introduction to the catalogue for the 2010 National Portrait Gallery exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* that Brooks' portraiture "play[s] with the language of masculine dominion," and states that her paintings of Rubinstein are "precisely the kind of reclining, sexually passive, and expectant female that male artists had portrayed."[108] However, he also erroneously refers to Alice Pike Barney as having been Brooks' lover and the subject of her 1920

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[103] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 86.
[104] Elliott + Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses?" (1994): 48.
[105] Cassandra Laity, *H.D and the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 34.
[106] Elliott + Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses?" (1994): 43-44.
[107] Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981): 363.
[108] Jonathan D. Katz, "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," in *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, ed. Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2010): 13.

portrait *L'Amazone*, rather than her daughter, Natalie Clifford Barney.[109] Langer further notes that Brooks' depiction of Rubinstein in *Le trajet* could be read as fitting in the Decadent tradition of vampiric lesbians, or as suggesting that "perverse" sex leads to death. However, she argues that rather, "Brooks is daring her viewers to share in an 'immoral' erotic space, a lesbian space depicting same-sex desire and gratification."[110] Returning to Elliott and Wallace's analysis, I further suggest that it is her "evocation of decadent sentiments" within a specifically lesbian context that makes her work transgressive.[111] Her use of this iconography is further evidence of her self-identification as an "outcast or lapidé,"[112] and makes clear her unwillingness to live, or create artwork, according to anyone else's norms. It is in looking to the past, by borrowing motifs from the Decadent movement which was itself a very backwards-looking movement, that Vivien and Brooks were able to develop "a way of reshaping the future.[113]" Using Heather Love's argument from her text *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, in working with these "negative" representations of lesbians, they are able to move forward while looking backward.[114] This, in turn, enables contemporary lesbians and other queers with "special insight into love's failures and impossibilities (as well as, of course, wild hopes for its future)."[115]

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[109] Katz, "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture, (2010): 13.
[110] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 72.
[111] Elliott + Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses?" (1994): 48.
[112] Ibid., 41.
[113] Bridget Elliott, "Performing the picture or painting the Other: Romaine Brooks, Gluck, and the question of Decadence in 1923," in *Women Artists and Modernism*, ed. Katy Deepwell, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998): 80.
[114] Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007): 148.
[115] Ibid., 23.

Marian Iconography & Lesbian Desire

The works which I discuss in this thesis are all representations of the Virgin Mary, or figures which bear a strong iconographical resemblance to her. The Virgin Mary plays a significant role in Catholic belief. She is the Mother of God, the Immaculate Virgin, the Queen of Heaven. The historian and mythographer Marina Warner notes that the Virgin Mary is "a polyvalent figure who appears under many guises, is the Church's female paragon, and the ideal of the feminine personified."[116] However, due to the Catholic church's attitudes towards women, she is still a woman, "subject and inferior to the male in the order of creation and society." She notes that these discourses "provide continual background interference to any discussion of the Virgin," and the Virgin in turn "accurately reflects this perennial ambivalence."[117] Adding another layer to these discourses is the fact that the early cult of the Virgin Mary is now understood as having integrated elements of pagan goddess worship, such as the cults of the Roman Cybele and Egyptian Isis, as well as the Greek virgin goddesses.[118] Warner further states that as Catholic doctrine evolved, the Church "transformed a mother goddess like the Virgin Mary into an effective instrument of asceticism and female subjection."[119] In their use of Marian iconography, Brooks and Vivien work within this discourse of contradiction and ambivalence to reject and subvert patriarchal norms. In their work, the Virgin Mary becomes "an indoor goddess, worshipped in darkened temples."[120]

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[116] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): xxxvii.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., 36.
[119] Ibid., 50.
[120] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 82.

Neither woman was raised in a Catholic family. Brooks' mother's family were members of Jehovah's Witness,[121] and she had been baptised Episcopalian at her paternal grandparent's request while at St. Mary's,[122] while Vivien's family was Protestant.[123] However, the Church played a role in both women's lives that would influence their work. Part of this influence was due to the relationship between Catholicism and the Decadent Movement, which I discussed in the previous section. It is also possible that it was the very fact of their Protestant upbringings that drew them to the Church, as Ruth Vanita suggests that this meant that they were unaware of debates around the worship of Mary within the Catholic Church, and were therefore "free to use the idea of Mary in transgressive ways," without fear of blasphemy.[124] They were also able to draw upon the mystical and medieval elements of the Church that appealed to them, without wholly accepting the Church's rule. Roden has argued that "religious discourse… offered a queer space for the expression of sexual deviance," as women celebrating the divine beauty of figures such as the Virgin Mary or female saints would not have been interpreted as homosexual.[125] For writers and artists who we would now consider "closeted," or who may not have seen themselves as lesbians, this would have been a powerful mode of self-expression. However, it is worth noting that neither Vivien nor Brooks made any attempt to conceal their "deviance." They were able to do so by virtue of their class, and by their choice to live in Paris, and these factors enabled them to speak openly about lesbian desire by the standards of the early twentieth century. Therefore, their decision to use religious symbolism in their work cannot be understood as just an attempt to subvert censorship, but as a deliberate attempt to construct a new

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[121] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 18.
[122] Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (1974): 64.
[123] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 48.
[124] Ruth Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 19.
[125] Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (2002): 192.

iconography of lesbian desire that drew on earlier examples. Additionally, as I show, their usage of Marian iconography specifically, rather than other forms of religious iconography, should be understood as articulating a specific kind of lesbian desire. Vanita, in her study of same-sex desire in the work of turn-of-the-century English women writers, uses the notion of the "Marian" model to explain the one form of relationship that can develop between women. This model "eroticizes the mother-daughter relationship"[126] and for relationships that fit within these models, the "transgressiveness of homoeroticism is heightened and/or mitigated by the incestuous or affective associations of tenderness between mother and daughter."[127] The concept of a "Marian" relationship between two women is further complicated by the Virgin Mary not having had a daughter, although as Warner notes, many of the maternal goddesses which had their cults incorporated into the early Christian church did have daughters, such as the Greco-Roman Demeter and her daughter Persephone.[128] In modelling their lesbian relationships after the Virgin Mary and an imagined daughter, Brooks, Vivien, and other women like them were not only subverting the patriarchal and patrilineal ideals of the Church and potentially feminising Christ[129], while also paying homage to the pagan roots of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Interestingly, Warner further notes that when Christianity was first becoming popularised in the Roman Empire, "it was common for a family to bring up the sons in the old religion and the daughters in the new," and this, accompanied with contemporary laws which allowed "a woman to inherit and dispose of her own wealth independently after a certain age," meant that the early Church "was vastly enriched by the fortunes of Roman women who either spurned marriage for

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[126] Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (1996): 2.
[127] Ibid., 12.
[128] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (2013): 283.
[129] Karla Jay notes Vivien's possible identification with a suffering Christ in *The Amazon and the Page*, but does not develop this idea further. See: Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 84-85.

a life of virginity or, as widows, bequeathed their private revenue to the Church."[130] The pull that the early Christian church had on Roman daughters unexpectedly mirrors in the lives of Vivien and Brooks, who, many centuries later, spurned marriage for a life of lesbianism (which, for Vivien, was a kind of virginity), and in doing so, were able to independently maintain their own inherited wealth. In both Vivien's and Brooks' works, these Marian figures are linked with two of their lovers, Natalie Clifford Barney and Ida Rubinstein, respectively.[131] Although there is no significant age or class difference between them and the women they depict in these works, as there are in a number of Vanita's examples, this dynamic is reproduced in these relationships. Although Vanita and de Lauretis disagree on several points, this dynamic can be further explained by expanding upon de Lauretis' writing towards/against a theory of a *lesbian* maternal imaginary. This is not a desire for the mother, per se, but the desire for an/other woman, who de Lauretis refers to as "the third woman" in this erotic triangle. By merging this "third woman" with an inherently maternal figure, and by further turning this maternal figure into a perverse one, Vivien and Brooks are able to work through the "changing roles, oscillating power, and differing desires" that played a part in their sexual relationships with other women.[132]

In 1904, Vivien published her only novel, the slim novella *A Woman Appeared to Me*, which was first published in France under the title *Une femme m'apparut*. The work is partially a fictionalised account of her relationship with Barney, which Gayle Rubin described in her introduction to Naiad Press' translation of the novel as "record[ing] less the events themselves

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[130] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (2013): 375-376, n26.
[131] Barney would later become Brooks' long-term partner, but the two would not begin a relationship until 1916, outside the scope of this paper.
[132] Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004): 114.

than Renée's emotional response to them."[133] Barney herself would later describe the novel as displaying "the worst excesses of 'art nouveau'" and say that in reading the text, she had "the unpleasant feeling of having posed for a bad portrait artist."[134] It is not an especially flattering portrayal of Barney, or the role she played in the dissolution of their relationship. In the novel, she becomes "Vally," a radiant beauty who is cruel and unfaithful to the narrator. Vivien splits herself into two characters - the unnamed narrator, and San Giovanni. Rubin describes the latter figure as "Renée's better half, her common sense, the courageous poet of Lesbos."[135] Other characters in the novella are also drawn from real life, but of most significance to this section of my analysis is "Ione," who represents Violet Shillito.

Violet Shillito was friends with Vivien for almost the entirety of her life, as they met as children when the Tarn family was briefly living in Paris. It was through Violet that Vivien and Barney met in 1897. According to Barney, the pair met when the Shillito sisters invited Barney to a theatrical performance that they were attending with Vivien. Afterwards, they took a carriage ride together, and Violet requested that Vivien read one of her poems, and Barney was struck by this "charming" young woman with the "soul and melancholy of a poet."[136] Shillito died from typhoid fever in 1901, and converted to Catholicism on her deathbed, although she was not given a Catholic burial as her Anglican parents refused to acknowledge the conversion.[137] When Shillito first became ill, she requested that Vivien travel with her to the South of France, where she was going to rest. Tragically, Vivien delayed the invitation, a decision that is often attributed

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[133] Gayle Rubin, introduction to *A Woman Appeared to Me*, by Renée Vivien (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1982): xii.
[134] Barney, "Renée Vivien," (1992): 24-25.
[135] Rubin, introduction to *A Woman Appeared to Me* (1982): xiii.
[136] Barney, "Renée Vivien," (1992): 15.
[137] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 11.

to her "all-consuming affair with Barney," and only arrived in the final days before her death.[138] In the novel, the narrator witnesses a Catholic priest arriving to give her last rites while in Ione's garden. Significantly, the garden is filled with white irises, a symbol of purity and of the Virgin Mary, specifically Our Lady of Sorrows.[139] The narrator is baffled and repulsed by Ione's decision - she refers to Catholicism as a "divine lie" and "the faith of simple souls which scorns, denies, and ridicules all reason."[140] However, she ultimately understands "why the priest had come," as she assumes that her awareness of her impending death, Ione had "taken refuge in the human consolation of the Catholic faith," with its "shining, open-doored heaven."[141] While this disdain the narrator feels for Ione's conversion may seem ironic considering Vivien's own conversion, the narrator experiences a similar fear of the unknown when confronting the reality of Ione's death. Faced with the "full horror of human decay," she flees from her bedside, and Ione dies that evening. At Ione's funeral, which occurs in the book immediately after this dream sequence, she feels that the "Christian consolations seemed…the most cruel mockery," and asks "what did God and the Infinite and Eternity mean, beside that corpse which was once a beloved being?"[142] However, she comes to the realisation that Ione's conversion had allowed her to die not only consoled, but "happy." This is followed by a short prayer, both for and to Ione, hoping that she "who [was] virginal tenderness before passion and above passion" is now able to rest.[143] The reference to "virginal tenderness" seems to invoke the Virgin Mary, as does another comment that Ione was her "comforter."

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[138] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 11.
[139] John S. Stokes, Jr., "Flowers of Mary's Sorrows," *University of Dayton*, last modified 2002, https://udayton.edu/marianlibrary/marysgardens/f/flowers-of-marys-sorrows.php
[140] Renée Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me*, trans. Jeanette H. Foster (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1982): 27.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 30.
[143] Ibid., 31.

Following Ione's death, the narrator has three significant encounters with the Virgin Mary. The first is after a catastrophic argument with Vally, caused by the narrator's jealousy over her lover's rumoured engagement to a man. In this argument, the narrator compares her devotion to Vally as being like "the monks and nuns who give up the world in their divine fervour" to the Madonna, which does nothing to placate Vally's anger at the narrator's jealousy.[144] Although the narrator compares her lover to a mother figure, in this scene she is attempting to take on the role of the maternal protector, but enacts a "maternal protection… which functions as control" over Vally's relationships.[145] This rejection by Vally leads the narrator to flee to Toledo, where she has a vision of "Our Lady of Fevers," or "the Madonna of Pestilence," a version of the Madonna to whom San Giovanni has previously devoted a poem.[146] However, soon the vision changes, and the Madonna's face becomes Vally's.[147] The narrator takes this as a sign that Vally was a corrupting force, who would never allow her to recover from their tumultuous relationship, nor from the death of Ione. There is an inversion of the expected role of mothers here, as the Madonna is turned into a symbol of corruption and destruction, rather than nurturing. Cassandra Laity argues that by transforming Barney into Vally, who subsequently transforms into the Madonna, she was able to develop "an effective image for the painful consequences attendant upon a female intimacy modelled too closely after the mother-daughter dyad."[148] The narrator fears her inability to "escape" from Vally, and that she will be "born again in the flame that had once consumed [her] suffering flesh."[149] Laity suggests that by portraying her relationship with

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[144] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me*, (1982): 40.
[145] Allen, "Djuna Barnes: The Erotics of Nurture," (1996): 30.
[146] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me* (1982): 41-42.
[147] Ibid., 42.
[148] Cassandra Laity, introduction to *Paint It Today*, by Hilda Doolittle (New York: New York University Press, 1992): xxv
[149] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me* (1982): 56.

Barney in this way, Vivien is able to "embody her 'terror' of a simultaneously appropriating and rejecting 'mother'."[150] The second time that the Madonna appears, it is not as a single apparition, but rather her presence seems to haunt the narrator over the course of a summer, during which time her relationship with one lover, Dagmar,[151] has ended, and her relationship with Eva has not yet begun. I discuss the latter relationship later in this thesis, and as such will not discuss it in detail here, but both are presented as being radically different from the narrator's relationship with Vally. As the narrator spends this summer avoiding Vally, while also being "haunted" by her image, the connection between the Madonna and Vally is made further explicit.[152] The third appearance comes at the very end of the novel, at a moment when the narrator is being made to choose between her past corrupting and consuming love for Vally, and her new redeeming love for Eva. The trio have met in a garden, and as the narrator is faced with "the terror of choosing," Our Lady of Fevers appears and fills the garden with poisonous flowers.[153] Although she and Vally do not merge in this scene, her sudden appearance is intended to highlight the corrupting effect that Vally has on the narrator.

Elisa Glick argues that for Vivien, "lesbian eroticism … *refuses* to fulfil desire, privileging the trembling caresses and ardent sufferings of a love with no beginning and no end."[154] This reading aptly describes the narrator's situation in *A Woman Appeared to Me*. The reader is introduced to her relationship with Vally after it has already begun, with no clear indication of how it has begun, and while the relationship is incredibly fraught, its presence

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[150] Laity, introduction to *Paint It Today* (1992): xxvi

[151] Dagmar was presumably based on the poet Olive Custance, a friend and lover of both Barney and Vivien who would go on to marry Lord Alfred Douglas, who was himself best known as Oscar Wilde's beloved Lord Bosie. See: Gayle Rubin, introduction to *A Woman Appeared to Me*, by Renée Vivien (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1982).

[152] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me* (1982): 54.

[153] Ibid: 62.

[154] Elisa Glick, "The Seductions of Sapphic Decadence," in *Materializing Queer Desire: Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009): 55.

remains throughout the novel, and it never truly "ends," thus refusing to follow "'pure' theoretical trajectories" of desire.[155] This was also true of Vivien and Barney's real-life relationship, as the two would continually reunite and separate between their initial breakup in 1901 and Vivien's death in 1909. The end of the novel further points towards desire without fulfilment, as the narrator is struggling to choose between Vally and a new lover, the serene Eva. Eva is assumed to be a composite character, merging elements of Vivien and Barney's longtime friend Eva Palmer with the Baroness Hélène van Zuylen de Nyevelt (née Rothschild).[156] Beyond Barney and Shillito, Hélène van Zuylen, often referred to as *la Baronne*, or somewhat unkindly, *la Brioche*, was arguably the most significant of Vivien's relationships. The two began a relationship in 1901, following Shillito's death in April of that year, and were together until 1907, although both had other partners as well during that time. While her other known lovers were close in age to Vivien, van Zuylen was fourteen years older, in addition to being the wife of Baron Etienne van Zuylen and a mother of two young sons. The exact nature of their relationship is somewhat unknown. While it was definitely a romantic and sexual relationship, some sources, including the author Colette, who was a close friend and neighbour of Vivien, alleged that the relationship was abusive, with van Zuylen controlling her younger partner and threatening to take her "to the other side of the world, to countries where [she] will be at her mercy."[157] There are also suggestions that it was a consensual sadomasochistic dynamic between the two, with Vivien acting as the submissive partner.[158] In any case, Rubin notes that for at least the first few years of the relationship, the relationship seems to have been a "healing" and "happy" one for Vivien, with the older van Zuylen acting as a comforter and encouraging Vivien's creative

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[155] Roof, *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (1991): 118.
[156] Rubin, introduction to *A Woman Appeared to Me* (Naiad Press, 1982): xiii.
[157] Colette, "Renée Vivien," in *The Pure and The Impure,* trans. Herma Briffault (New York: Penguin, 1980): 82.
[158] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928,* (2004): 197.

work.[159] Within the novel, Eva too becomes a sort of Marian figure, albeit in a less perverse, more subtle form than Vally and the Madonna of Pestilence. When Eva and the narrator are reunited, Eva informs her lover that she is "not afraid of anything," and that she "shall be stronger than all human pain, because [she is] Pity,"[160] which aligns her with the Virgin Mary as Mater Dolorosa, the Mother of Sorrows, whose "participation in mankind's ordinary, painful lot" ensures that she can be depended upon as a source of pity and comfort.[161] The narrator later describes her as having "the red halo of a martyr," and that there are "Easter lilies beneath her feet."[162] Confronted once again with the spectre of Our Lady of Fevers in addition to these two women, the narrator ambiguously states "Farewell…and till we meet again."[163] This echoes a conversation the narrator had previously had with San Giovanni, where she had advised the narrator to "never choose," but suggests that while Eva may be the happier choice, Vally would be the preferable choice for a poet.[164]

Brooks' work from before 1915 tends to be more allegorical than the later portraiture for which she is better known. It is within these earlier works, which the art historian Whitney Chadwick notably claims show the influence of contemporary poets such as Vivien[165], that some Marian figures can be found. This, perhaps, shows the influence that the convent school continued to have on her, as while in attendance she was made to paint "innumerable pendants of doleful

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[159] Rubin, introduction to *A Woman Appeared to Me* (1982): xix
[160] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me* (1982): 55.
[161] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (2013): 219.
[162] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me* (1982): 57.
[163] Ibid., 63.
[164] Ibid., 57.
[165] Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 20.

virgins."[166] There are two works in particular on which I will focus my analysis, all of which used Brooks' then-lover, the Russian ballet dancer Ida Rubinstein (1883-1960), as a model. These are the paintings *Spring* (1912) and *Le Trajet* (1911). While the Virgin Mary is a semi-frequently recurring figure in Vivien's work, these are the only works of Brooks' from this period[167] which bear a resemblance to Marian icons.

The lone figure in *Spring* is perhaps the most overtly Marian figure in Brooks' oeuvre [Figure 5]. In this work, a nude woman draped in a black cloak and wearing a crown stands in a shockingly vivid (by Brooks' standards) green landscape, dropping a trail of wildflowers. She stands to the left of the image, and her cloak pools along the bottom of the canvas. Behind her is a winding path, which appears to be leading to a forest, although this is not clear. Going up the length of the right of the image, there is a birch tree. Its foliage is largely cut off by the top edge of the work, leaving only a few bare branches visible. A white doe appears to be fleeing in the opposite direction from the figure. This Marian reading is highlighted by Langer, who notes the abundance of symbolism associated with virginal purity in the painting, such as a white doe and white flowers, and states that "the figure's downcast eyes" further recall depictions of the Virgin Mary.[168] Although this scene is sometimes read as depicting a pagan goddess, it is worth noting that unlike Barney, Brooks did not consider herself a pagan. In her memoir, she recounts being told by a friend about his pagan love for the "marble head of a beautiful Greek boy," which she

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[166] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

[167] In the 1930s, Brooks completed a large number of surreal illustrations, some of which contain similar imagery to her works from the early 1910s, including maternal figures. See: Melanie C. Hawthorne, "When You Cannot Run, You Cannot Hide: Romaine Brooks Draws (On) The Past," *Romance Studies* 34, no. 1 (2016).

[168] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 73

compares to the adoration she felt for the photograph of a young nun who had died while she attended the convent school.[169]

The composition of *Le Trajet* is reminiscent of a specific kind of Marian icon - that of the Assumption of the Virgin, or her death and ascension into Heaven [Figure 6]. According to Catholic teachings which developed in the Middle Ages, at the moment of her death, Mary was brought into heaven, body and soul. Marina Warner explains that this immediate ascension is necessary for maintaining the story of the immaculate conception, as "the unchanged womb of the Virgin… which experiencing alteration is yet unaltered, is the mirror image of the unchanged body of the Virgin, which experiences death and does not decay."[170] She is incorruptible - if her body were to decay, then she could no longer be immaculate. While many representations of this scene from the Baroque period and later depict the act of ascension itself, earlier icons tended to depict the Virgin Mary lying on her deathbed, not yet dead but completely at peace. In representations such as El Greco's *Dormition of the Virgin* (1565-1566), her posture is nearly identical to Rubinstein's in this work [Figure 7]. The title of the work also lends itself to this reading. While the French title literally translates into "the path," in English it is most often given the title *The Crossing*. On occasions when the work was exhibited, Brooks herself would sometimes give it the much more explicit title *The Dead Woman (La Femme Morte).*[171] While the Madonna is often depicted surrounded by loved ones and disciples, with her son and a chorus of angels ready to receive her, Brooks' figure is alone. There is no discernible background, and

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[169] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
[170] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (2013): 97.
[171] Joe Lucchesi, "Romaine Brooks' Self-Portrait Photographs and the Performance of Lesbian Identity," *Athanor* 16 (1998): 53.

the only other feature is the abstract form of the figure's deathbed. One of Rubinstein's biographers, Vicki Woolf, suggests that the form resembles a lily, a flower that is often associated with the Virgin Mary.[172] The lily was also a favourite flower of Rubinstein, and Brooks would often compare her androgynous, pale beauty to the lily.[173] The figure appears to be floating in an inky void, although the art historian Joe Lucchesi notes that there is evidence that the background was originally the same green as *Spring*.[174] In this way, the work is also quite different from Brooks' other nude paintings of Rubinstein from this same period. Her 1910 painting *White Azaleas*, for example, places Rubinstein in Brooks' distinct apartment, hinting at the relationship between the two women and, for those who knew Brooks and her apartment more intimately, it would have allowed her to stake a claim on Rubinstein's body [Figure 8].[175] Lucchesi suggests that by depicting Rubinstein as a near-corpse, suspended in darkness, in *Le Trajet*, Brooks' representation enables the lesbian body to "simultaneously assert its visible presence within representation and reaffirm its absolute otherness."[176] This too sets up an analogy between Rubinstein and the Virgin Mary - both are human and more-than, dead and undying.

The relationship between Brooks and Rubinstein was not nearly as tempestuous as the one between Vivien and Barney. Brooks' Marian depictions of Rubinstein are therefore not necessarily representative of her "'terror' of a simultaneously appropriating and rejecting

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[172] Vicki Woolf, *Dancing in the Vortex: The Story of Ida Rubinstein* (London: Routledge, 2000): 46.
[173] Ibid., 152.
[174] Joe Lucchesi, "'An Apparition in a Black Flowing Cloak': Romaine Brooks's Portraits of Ida Rubinstein," essay in *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks,* by Whitney Chadwick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 82.
[175] Ibid., 78.
[176] Lucchesi, "Romaine Brooks' Self-Portrait Photographs and the Performance of Lesbian Identity," (1998): 53.

'mother',"[177] as Laity suggests they were for Vivien. Rather, Brooks' paintings of Rubinstein suggest "the fantasy of a femininity at once constrained and defiant," wherein the female body "is the site of sexuality that is both incited and forbidden or regulated."[178] The Virgin Mary is one potential vessel for this fantasy. She is "assimilated to paternal law" by the doctrine of the Catholic church, but/and remains a symbol of female power, a chaste virgin and the image of female beauty.[179] Brooks therefore not only subverts these patriarchal representations of the Virgin Mary, but also transforms Rubinstein's body into the aforementioned site of sexuality that is both incited and forbidden. Per de Lauretis, this scenario is "female-directed and female-centred," and "hinge[s] on the power and control of the sexual female body by and for women."[180] In her representations of Rubinstein, Brooks develops a distinctly lesbian erotic figure[181], but does so in such a way that while her nude body is fully on display, her "interior identity…will never be recovered or revealed," except by her female lover.[182] When Rubinstein appeared in Gabriel D'Annunzio's and Claude Debussy's theatrical performance *Le martyre de saint Sébastien* in 1911, the archbishop of Paris forbade Catholics from seeing the performance, not only due to the potentially profane nature of the material, but because it was a Jewish woman portraying the Catholic St. Sebastian.[183] Chadwick notes that "at the end of the nineteenth century, Saint Sebastian was widely understood as the quintessential male image of self-mortification and erotic revelation," and for D'Annunzio, Rubinstein's "sexual ambiguity" made her the perfect vehicle "for the expression of Christian symbolism, erotic imagery, heroic

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[177] Laity, introduction to *Paint It Today* (1992): xxvi
[178] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994): 265.
[179] Mary Jacobus, "*Dora* and the Pregnant Madonna," In *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 143
[180] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994): 265.
[181] Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks*, (2000): 26.
[182] Lucchesi, "'An Apparition in a Black Flowing Cloak'," (2000): 84.
[183] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 70.

suffering, and violence," and, perhaps, the *homo*eroticism present in many other representations of the saint.[184] Richard A. Kaye notes that nineteenth-century viewers of depictions of St. Sebastian would have "viewed Sebastian's arrow-ridden body in far more than religiously symbolic terms, as that of a penetrated male who is beatifically ecstatic and not merely submissive."[185] Kaye argues that this would have held particular significance for male homosexual viewers, and "the martyred Sebastian's 'feminine' demeanour as the object of a subjectively determined 'gaze' - both a metaphorical and literal target - collapsed into his role as the homosexual male's personal saint."[186] Significantly, Oscar Wilde, who made frequent references to the saint in his writings, chose to travel to Paris under the name "Sebastian Melmoth" following his release from Reading Gaol.[187] Brooks would have certainly been aware of the controversy surrounding Rubinstein's performance in *Le martyre de saint Sébastien*, and it is likely that she was familiar with Saint Sebastian's position as a homoerotic icon. In depicting Rubinstein as a Marian figure, she was drawing from the same internal source that caused her to rebel during her childhood stay at a Catholic convent.[188] In the Catholic imagination, the Virgin Mary is held up as the "icon of feminine perfection, built on the equivalence between goodness, motherhood, purity, gentleness, and submission."[189] In these works, Rubinstein, like Vivien's Marian figures, becomes "an emblem of feminine autonomy and fortitude in her capacity for comfort and cruelty.[190]"

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[184] Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks*, (2000): 24.
[185] Richard A. Kaye, "'Determined Raptures': St. Sebastian and the Victorian Discourse of Decadence," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27, no. 1 (1999): 270.
[186] Ibid., 271.
[187] Ibid., 296.
[188] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 27.
[189] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (2013): 342.
[190] Vivien Hennessy, "Seeking Transcendence: Death, Rebirth, and Transformation in the Poetry of Renée Vivien (1877-1909)," (doctoral thesis, Mary Elizabeth College, University of Limerick, 2015): 195.

Regarding the Marian model for lesbian relationships posited by Vanita, it is not difficult to see Brooks as filling the mother role, and Rubinstein the daughter. Brooks was several years older than Rubinstein, and based on descriptions of their relationship, it does appear that Rubinstein fit into the typical "daughter" role. One gets the impression that she desired to be the "primary interest" of the older woman,[191] and Secrest suggests that the relationship ended in part because Rubinstein was totally devoted to Brooks, and wanted the same from Brooks.[192] However, it is difficult to imagine Brooks aligning herself with the mother role. Her short-lived affair with Vivien ended for a similar reason, as she apparently "intimated that an old friend of hers," likely van Zuylen, was jealous of Brooks, hoping that this would spur Brooks into becoming more attached to her.[193] This attempt did not succeed. In her memoirs, she barely hints at her sexual relationship with Rubinstein, despite discussing their collaboration in some detail. In this way, Brooks seems to be reproducing the kind of motherhood that she was familiar with, one of "lack instead of a nostalgia for plentitude."[194]

What these figures in Vivien's and Brooks's work have in common is what they lack. None of these Marian and pseudo-Marian figures have a child, nor are they pregnant. In Freudian terms, they are doubly castrated. In Freud's 1917 essay "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism," a woman with a "castration complex" can have her desire for a penis "replaced

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[191] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (2004): 114.
[192] Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks* (1974): 243.
[193] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
[194] Roof, *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* (1991): 114.

by the wish for a baby."[195] However, I would suggest that in depicting the Virgin Mary without Christ, Vivien and Brooks reclaim this figure from patriarchal norms, and use her to work through their complex feelings about pregnancy and motherhood. Hawthorne suggests that Brooks' pregnancy likely contributed to her "perception of lack of control over the circumstances of her life, [and] her sense of imprisonment."[196] She may have felt a sympathetic kinship with the Virgin Mary, who arguably had minimal say in her becoming pregnant. By depicting Marian figures who are without a child, but still appear powerful and transcendent, Brooks may be attempting to reclaim a sense of control over her own experiences. For Vivien, who was never pregnant and who was clearly repulsed by pregnancy, her use of Marian figures without a child suggest a similar goal, in that she denies the idea that it is a woman's destiny to bear children. In both cases, they are subverting the patriarchal ideology of the Catholic church, and allowing the Virgin Mary to become powerful on her own, and not secondary to a powerful male figure.

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[195] Sigmund Freud, "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism," *Freud on Women: A Reader*, ed. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991): 198.
[196] Hawthorne, "When You Cannot Run, You Cannot Hide," (2016): 17-18.

Virginity & Virgin Mothers

The Virgin Mary's significance to early twentieth century non-heterosexual women writers in England has been explored in depth by Ruth Vanita and Sarah Parker. Parker suggests that part of Mary's appeal is her "mysterious and contradictory sexual status," as a virgin who is also a mother.[197] In Jay's analysis of representations of the Virgin Mary in Vivien's writing, she is primarily interested in the connections between the Virgin Mary and other, pagan goddesses.[198] Warner notes that within the history of the early Christian church, "it is occasionally possible to pinpoint an exact location of interchange in the cult of the Virgin Mary… where one pagan goddess was supplanted by the Christian mother" as the church established dominance.[199] In focusing on the pagan roots of the Virgin Mary, as Jay does, there is a tendency to overlook her role as a virgin *mother*. This separates her from other virginal goddesses such as the Greek Athena and Artemis, with whom Jay draws a connection. The Virgin Mary's position as a mother is not necessarily ignored or overlooked by Vivien and Brooks, but rather is interpreted and re-interpreted, as they seem interested in different aspects of this "contradictory sexual status." For Vivien, there is a desire to tie virginity and purity with non-reproductive sexuality, whereas for Brooks, her own lack of agency in becoming a mother seems to have been reflected by the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception.

For women such as Vivien, virginity did not - necessarily - refer to a total lack of sex. Rather, it was penetrative sex with men specifically that caused women to lose their virginity. It was possible for a woman to be sexually involved with other women, while still considering herself

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[197] Sarah Parker, *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity, 1889-1930* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013): 30.
[198] Jay, *The Amazon and the Page* (1988): 81.
[199] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (2013): 49.

to be a virgin. This sense that sex between two women was not *real* sex was also, in a circuitous way, a Catholic position. Joanne Glasgow argues that within Catholic teachings, mentions of lesbian sex are virtually non-existent. While male homosexuals have been persecuted and discriminated against by the Church for centuries, women's sexuality "exists only insofar as it elicits sexual responses from men." To acknowledge that women could elicit a sexual response from other women would require women's sexuality to be "redefined within the general doctrines and practices of sexual morality."[200] Therefore, sex between women, and lesbianism more broadly, "did not exist as a Catholic reality."[201] It was exactly this logic that allowed two other famous lesbian Catholic converts, Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943) and Una Troubridge (1887-1963), to continue their relationship while remaining devout Catholics. Glasgow recounts a story in which an unnamed friend asked Troubridge what she said about her relationship with Hall and their "inversion" when she took the sacrament of confession, to which Troubridge allegedly replied that she had nothing to confess.[202]

It is important to keep in mind that while Vivien herself was quite liberated, she was still writing during a time where women, particularly those in her social class, were expected to be wed and bear children. As Jay points out, in Vivien's writings, the desire to maintain one's virginity is less about chastity or autonomy than "repugnance at the demands their own bodies are likely to make on their idealised versions of themselves."[203] In *A Woman Appeared to Me,* when one of the narrator's lovers, the cherubic, bisexual Dagmar, gets married to a man, she "lament[s] for that virginal grace barbarously violated" and fears that "hideous maternity would

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[200] Joanne Glasgow, "What's a Nice Lesbian Like You Doing in the Church of Torquemada? Radclyffe Hall and Other Catholic Converts," in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York University Press, 1990): 249.
[201] Ibid., 242.
[202] Ibid., 244.
[203] Jay, *The Amazon and the Page* (1988): 50.

deform that slim, sexless body."[204] Although I lack the space to do so here, the narrator's relationship with Dagmar is deserving of further analysis. Her desire for the "child-like" woman is not only maternal, with the narrator "feeling the tender pride of the being who dominates and protects,"[205] but also violent, as she is often overcome with a desire to possess her lover, to bite her lips or make her "tremble with terror or love."[206]

Unfortunately, there is little to no information available on how Brooks felt about being a mother, or if she would have considered herself to be one. Her memoirs do not mention the pregnancy, although it is hinted at. A section regarding "a rest in the country" comes shortly after her describing her experience with her "brother's doctor," i.e. Alexander Phillips - perhaps tellingly, Maya is barely mentioned in her memoirs.[207] Langer suggests that her pregnancy had a lasting effect on her, and enabled her to build a stronger relationship with Barney's other long-term partner, Élisabeth "Lily" de Gramont (1875-1954). In 1930, after one of de Gramont's daughters had died, she stayed with Romaine at one of her Italian villas, as supposedly "Romaine could provide the sensitivity and support she required, [and] they could grieve together as mothers."[208] Although I do not want to minimise Brooks' connection with de Gramont, what Langer is suggesting here seems highly essentialist, and precipitated on an assumption that "motherhood" comes naturally to women. Hawthorne notes that "at a time when maternity still played such an important role in the cultural definition of what it meant to be a woman," Brooks

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[204] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me* (1982): 54.
[205] Ibid., 49.
[206] Ibid., 50.
[207] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
[208] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 111.

chose to reject the role of "mother"[209] by giving up her daughter. Again, however, it is impossible to know to what extent the decision was hers to make. Brooks was living in near-poverty at that time, she was estranged from her mother (and was clearly loath to ask her for help), and perhaps most significantly, she was not married. If the father was indeed Phillips, her sister's soon-to-be husband, it seems doubtful that he would have been willing to claim the child had Brooks kept it. As I have shown, she would reject the "mother" role in her erotic relationships, or rather, would emulate the absent mother she was familiar with. It is unfair to extrapolate from this what kind of a mother Brooks' would have been to her actual daughter, had Jeanne-Louise lived. Rather, in focusing on her adult relationships with other women, it is apparent that she sought out relationships which allowed her to "enjoy sensuality without risking consequences they could not control,"[210] like pregnancy, and which allowed her to work through the "lingering feelings" of her relationship with her mother, and the effects this had on her relationship with her own body.[211]

[209] Hawthorne, "When You Cannot Run, You Cannot Hide," (2016): 17-18.
[210] Benstock, "Natalie Barney: Rue Jacob," (1986): 289.
[211] Hawthorne, "When You Cannot Run, You Cannot Hide," (2016): 22.

Towards A Lesbian-Centric Future

It is clear that Vivien felt that art and literature were capable of forming a new ideal world, made evident by a poem published in 1906 titled "Nous irons vers les poètes," wherein the downtrodden members of society (i.e., women), "will enter into the kingdom of the poets."[212] Her vision of an idealised society is one where women were wholly free from men and the sexual and psychic violence they inflicted on women. While it is unclear if Vivien ever explicitly aligned herself with the burgeoning feminist movements of the early twentieth century, she was briefly a contributor to the French feminist newspaper *La Fronde* in 1903. Appropriately, her contributions were poems, rather than the "explicitly political copy" for which the publication was better known.[213] Additionally, Vivien and Barney sought to reestablish Sappho's colony of women, both within Paris and on the island of Lesbos. Although the latter project would not be successful, it was clear that Vivien actively sought out community with other women writers and artists, despite her reputation as a recluse.[214] It was these ideals that would not only inspire Barney to establish her salon as an Académie des Femmes, which served as a forum for women writers,[215] but would lead both Barney and van Zuylen to establish the Prix Renée Vivien, a literary prize and endowment for French women poets who are beginning their literary careers.[216]

While Vivien was dedicated to her celebration of lesbian sexuality and her pursuit of a female-centric society, the same cannot necessarily be said of Brooks. Tirza True Latimer notes that

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[212] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page* (1988): 51-52.
[213] Melanie C. Hawthorne, "*Renée Vivien, frondeuse*: A Woman Taking Pleasure in Behaving Badly," in *Plaisirs des femmes: Women, Pleasure, and Transgression in French Literature and Culture*, ed. Maggie Allison, Elliott Evans and Carrie Tarr (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019): 193.
[214] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928,* (2004): 194.
[215] Jay, *The Amazon and the Page* (1988): 122.
[216] Tama Lea Engelking, "The Problematics of French 'Poesie Feminine': Early Twentieth Century Parisian Women Poets." (doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 198): 282.

Brooks' paintings were meant "to affirm the portrait sitter's historical legitimacy, to recognize the sitter's status in the present, and to secure both the sitter's and the painter's place in posterity."[217] While Latimer is primarily referring to Brooks' post-1920 portraits of her and Barney's circle, which included notable Sapphic figures such as Radclyffe Hall's partner Una Troubridge, the painter Gluck (1895-1978), and Barney herself, it can also be said of her earlier portraits of Ida Rubinstein. These works also did help to memorialise those figures, at least within queer history if not larger society. Brooks' creation and later promotion of her work, as exemplified by Barney and Brooks' fervent campaigning to "lodge the entire collection" of Brooks' paintings, as well as many of her personal papers and the manuscript of *No Pleasant Memories* in the Smithsonian Museum,[218] which did much to preserve the legacy of those who sat for her, therefore helping to assert the existence of queer women in 1920s Paris. However, and perhaps more significantly, it helped her to assert her own legacy as a great painter. As Elliott has pointed out in her description of Brooks' complicated relationship and ultimate falling out with Gluck, Brooks saw herself "neither as part of a community of women artists nor as participant in any school or group,"[219] which stands in stark contrast to Vivien's desire to foster a community of like-minded women. Borrowing from Heather Love's discussion of Willa Cather and Radclyffe Hall, two similarly conservative and withdrawn figures, Brooks' vision of herself as a *lapidé* is the product of "a deeply felt psychic and corporeal state of abandonment, refusal, and loss," which is "a social experience insistently internalised and corporeal, felt to be both essential and permanent."[220] Although it is easy to read Brooks' isolation as self-inflicted, it is

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[217] Tirza True Latimer, "Romaine Brooks and the Future of Sapphic Modernity," in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, ed. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 38
[218] Ibid., 42.
[219] Elliott, "Performing the picture or painting the Other," (1998): 80.
[220] Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007): 198.

not necessary to "try to give them the gift of modern sexual identity and queer community," but rather embrace that "what they have to give us is an inheritance of historical anxiety and longing," which enables us to better work through feelings of ambivalence and shame in the present.[221]

With that being said, there is also the issue of Brooks' politics. Throughout her life, she made no secret of her antisemitism, despite her relationship with Ida Rubinstein and friendships with other Jewish artists and intellectuals.[222] During the Second World War, which she and Barney spent in Florence, Brooks actively supported Mussolini and the Italian Fascist party. Langer notes that Fascism "offered a return to order following the chaos of war" that would have greatly appealed to the conservative, wealthy Brooks, particularly when contrasted with Soviet Bolshevism.[223] Indeed, while her politics remained deeply conservative, spending the war in Italy did strip her of her "Fascist illusions," having seen first-hand the effect Mussolini's reign had on the country while simultaneously struggling to protect the quarter-Jewish Barney.[224] Langer argues that Brooks' work cannot be described as "Fascist," as "the only political painting she ever completed was *La France croisée,* which was a call for peace."[225] While it may be her only overtly political work, and while I would not necessarily describe her oeuvre as "Fascist," it is difficult to not be troubled by several of her other works in light of her politics. The celebration of white bodies is a key feature of her nudes, even when that white body belongs to a Jewish sitter, i.e. Rubinstein, whom she described as being "an exquisite achievement of that ancient

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[221] Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007): 98.
[222] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 53.
[223] Ibid., 161.
[224] Ibid., 174.
[225] Ibid., 158.

race."[226] And what is one to make of her friendship with and portrait of the Italian poet and Fascist Gabriel D'Annunzio, which she considered one of her "dearest" portraits?[227] Or her later portrait of the American writer and photographer Carl van Vechten, known for his complex and oft-problematic relationships with Black artists, whom she referred to as a "resplendent white king" and depicted "seated against a backdrop of African American heads"?[228] These two portraits were painted in 1912 and 1936, respectively, pointing towards the fact that her politics were conservative for virtually her entire life.

It would be unfair to solely focus on Brooks' more problematic traits. The association of whiteness with purity, androgyny, and eroticism is a recurring motif in both Brooks' and Vivien's work, and in work being created at the turn of the century more broadly. Cassandra Laity has written extensively on the role that whiteness, and its association with marble statuary, played in homoerotic fin-de-siecle poetics, although she does not discuss the racial implications of this imagery.[229] If whiteness, and white skin, are emblems of purity and virginity, notions that are clearly important to Vivien, then what does this imply for women who are Brown or Black? Sarah Parker makes it clear that the turn-of-the-century lesbian ideal "as slender, white, able-bodied and virginal" overlooked the reality of life for many non-heterosexual woman, and was made possible by a position of class and racial privilege.[230] Vivien's vision of a utopian, gynocentric society seemed to be populated entirely by women who looked like her and Barney,

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[226] Romaine Brooks, "No Pleasant Memories," unpublished typescript, 1938. Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973. National Collection of Fine Arts Research Materials on Romaine Brooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.
[227] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 193.
[228] Ibid., 153.
[229] Laity, *H.D and the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle*, (1996): 93.
[230] Sarah Parker, "Cherchez La Femme: Looking for Lesbian Femininities in Literature, 1850–1928," in *Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond*, ed. Barbara Leonardi (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018): 266.

and had a similar degree of wealth, status, and education.[231] Additionally, although Vivien was certainly not an antisemite in the way that Brooks was, writers such as Jay have pointed out the problematic nature of her characterization of Jewish slave women in some of her poems set in antiquity, which tended to present Jewish women as "fearful and abject."[232] Her references to Barney's Jewish heritage in *A Woman Appeared to Me* are also problematic, but in a different way. By praising Vally for having "all the charm of a blonde Jewess," courtesy of her mother's half-Jewish background, while constantly reiterating the beauty of her "moonlight hair," blue eyes, and radiant white skin,[233] Vivien is fetishizing her lover's exotic "Otherness," while also re-establishing "the overdetermined whiteness" of the desirable lesbian.[234]

In some Decadent novels, including notably the work of Victorian homosexual author Walter Pater, the Virgin Mary came to symbolise rebirth and hope.[235] In her perverse form, she comes to represent the possibility of the rebirth of a lesbian society, tied to an idealised past. If, as Warner puts it, "the cult of the Virgin mirrored the feminine ideal of the Catholic ethic," then Vivien and Brooks' representations of the Virgin mirror their erotic, lesbian ethic.[236] Additionally, Vivien Hennessy suggests that in Vivien's usage of the Madonna of Pestilence, she is "reclaiming" the Virgin Mary as "a symbol of alterity," allowing her to become "*Notre* Dame to Vivien and her community."[237] In this conclusion, I would like to return to Cassandra Langer's discussion of Brooks' *Spring*. She describes the work as "a Sapphic fantasy of a purely feminised

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[231] Jay, *The Amazon and The Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (1988): 52.
[232] Ibid., 130n16.
[233] Vivien, *A Woman Appeared To Me* (1982): 9.
[234] Parker, "Cherchez La Femme: Looking for Lesbian Femininities in Literature, 1850–1928," (2018): 262.
[235] Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (1997): 228.
[236] Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult and the Myth of the Virgin Mary* (2013): 188.
[237] Hennessy, "Seeking Transcendence," (doctoral thesis, 2015): 194.

environment, untouched by man, where lesbian desire has free range."[238] This is certainly the kind of society that Vivien was hoping to build through her poetry and her work with other like-minded women. While Brooks was much more individualistic than Vivien, her work speaks to a desire to "upset the signifying practices of the dominant social order," through "the construction of new meanings, identities, and communities."[239] In reading this fantasy shown in *Spring*, and Vivien and Brooks' use of Marian figures, in purely Freudian terms, it is tempting to see it as a sort of regression, or "the nostalgic wish to return to the undifferentiated fusion of the pre-Oedipal period."[240] However, their use of Decadent forms, as well as their difficult relationships to Western, bourgeois conceptions of motherhood, complicates this reading. Rather, they are invoking the past, referring to not only their use of figures like the Virgin Mary but also their own family histories. While these histories are marked by Vivien and Brooks' class and racial privileges, this usage of the past can serve as a model towards a more lesbian-centric future.

[238] Langer, *Romaine Brooks: A Life* (2015): 73.
[239] Elliott + Wallace, "Fleurs du Mal or Second-Hand Roses?" (1994): 54.
[240] de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994): 200.

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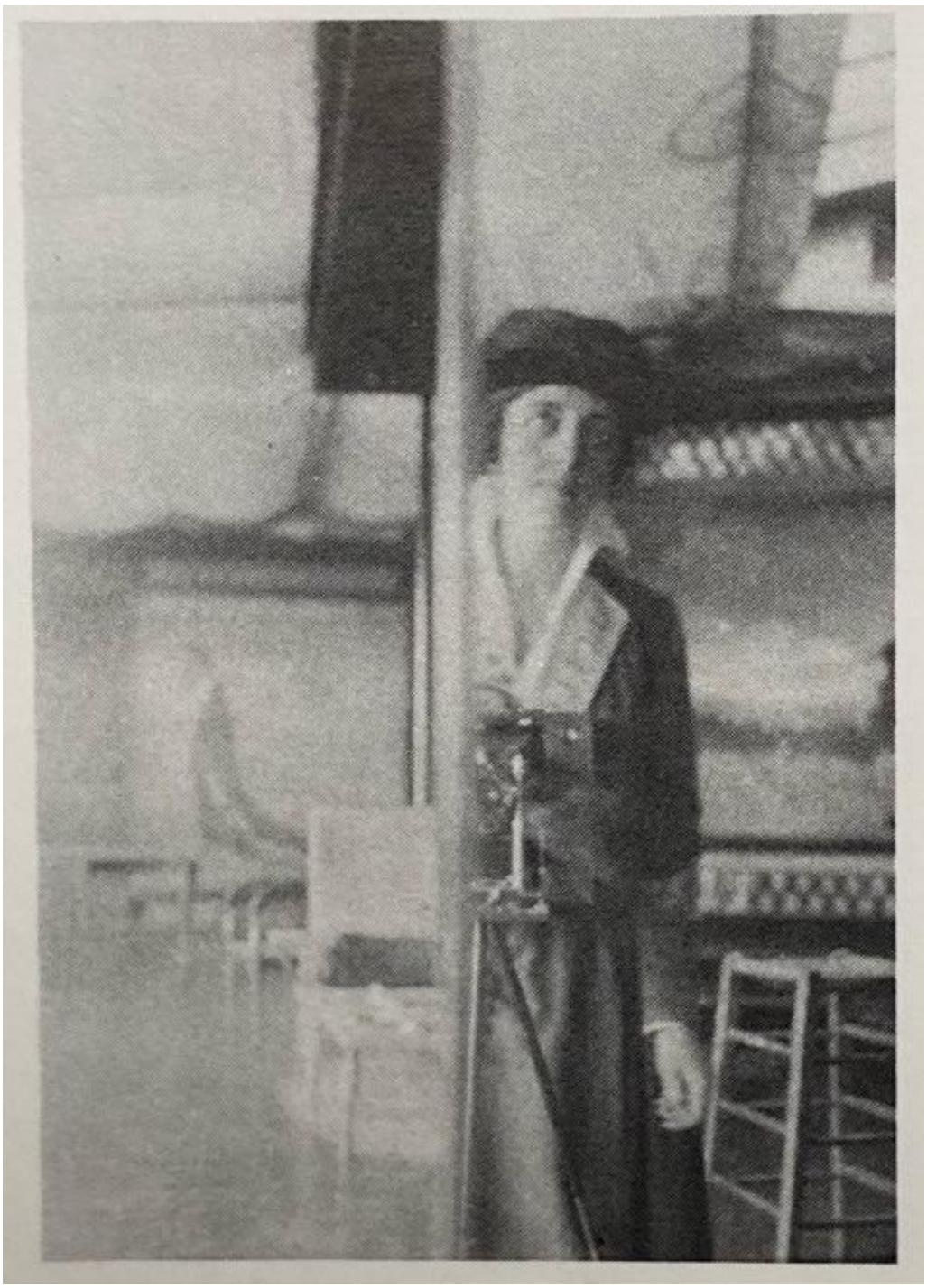

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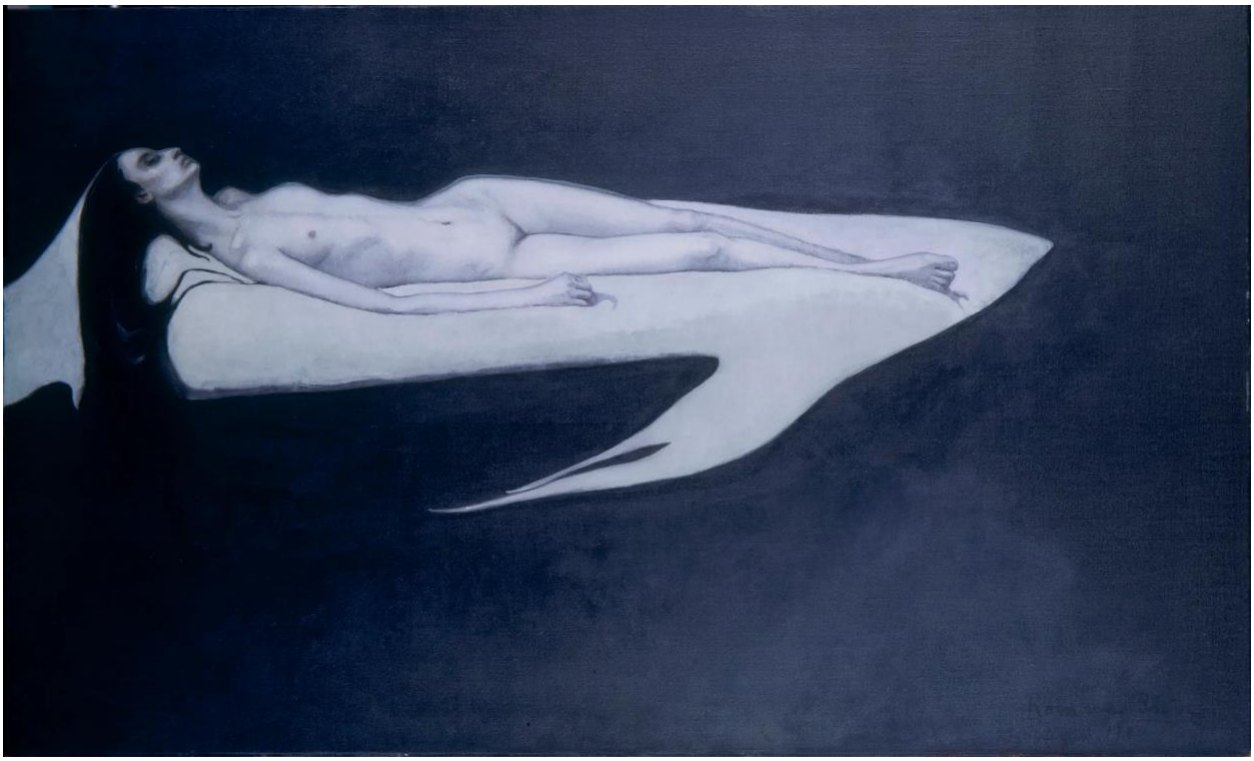

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