**Barney, Natalie Clifford** (1876-1972)

Natalie Barney was an expatriate American writer who lived in Paris. In her home at 20 rue Jacob, Barney established a salon that for over sixty years brought together intellectuals and artists. In 1927, in response to the exclusively male French Academy, she formed the *Académie des Femmes* to organize and promote women writers. Throughout her career, Barney supported feminist issues and worked to revise the prevailing image of lesbianism constructed around notions of illness, perversion, or inversion.

Barney was the daughter of Albert Clifford Barney and Alice Pike Barney. Her father inherited a railroad car company; her mother was the heir to a whiskey fortune in addition to being an accomplished portrait painter. Her family’s wealth provided her freedom from social stricture in both her daily life and her literary works. Her inherited fortune also allowed Barney to live openly in lesbian relationships with notable women, including Renée Vivien and Romaine Brooks, and to financially support the arts as she desired.

In 1900, Barney published her first book, *Quelques Portraits-Sonnets de Femmes* [*Some Portraits and Sonnets of Women*], a collection of poems in which she addresses women, praising their beauty and their shared love.

To avoid her father’s interference, Barney published her second book, *Cinc petits dialogues grecs* [*Five Short Greek Dialogues*] (1901), under the pseudonym Tryphé. In this book, she dedicates herself to Sapphic culture because it provides a unifying artistic and sexual alternative to patriarchal norms. This theme continues in *Actes et entr’actes* [*Acts and Interludes*] (1910), a collection of short plays and poems that includes *Équivoque* [*Ambiguity*], which revises the legend of Sappho’s suicide.

Barney also wrote texts that can be classified as *pensées*, epigrams, and memoirs.This generic turn begins in 1910 with her first collection of epigrams, *Éparpillements* [*Scatterings*]. It continues with the 1920 publication of *Pensées d’une Amazone* [*Thoughts of an Amazon*], a political work that develops feminist and pacifist themes, including war being an extreme form of male aggression. *Aventures de l’espirit* [*Adventures of the Mind*] (1929) provides a social diagram of the people who had attended her salon, mapping them in relation to the salon’s physical spaces of house, garden, and Temple of Friendship. Barney’s other memoirs include, *Souvenirs indiscrets* [*Indiscreet Memories*] (1960) and *Traits et portraits* [*Traits and Portraits*] (1963).

Barney’s only novel, *The One Who Is Legion* (1930), concerns three plot points: the suicide of A.D; her resurrection as a hermaphrodite; and the discovery of a book of epigrams about her own life*.* The novel’s form and content suggest that this story is both a commentary on Barney’s writing and an attempt to understand Vivien’s suicide.

**References and Further Reading:**

Benstock, Shari. *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*.

Jay, Karla. *The Amazon and the Page*.

Wickes, George. *The Amazon of Letters: The Life and Loves of Natalie Barney*.

**Chronology of Major Published Works:**

*Quelques portraits-sonnets de femmes* (1900)

*Cinc petits dialogues grecs* (1901)

*Actes et entr’actes* (1910)

*Je me souviens* [*I remember*] (1910)

*Éparpillements* (1910)

*Pensées d’une amazone* (1920)

*Aventures de l’espirit* (1929)

*The One Who Is Legion* (1930)

*Nouvelles pensées de l’amazone,* [*New Thoughts of the Amazon*] (1939)

*Souvenirs indiscrets* (1960)

*Traits et portraits* (1963)

**MULTIMEDIA TO LINK TO:**

* “Natalie Barney in Front of the Temple of Friendship”: <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/image.php?i=37&image=658&b=bio>
* Natalie Barney portrait: <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/image.php?i=37&image=651&b=bio>