SCREENING LOVE AND SEX
IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Edited by
Monica S. Cyrino

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SCREENING LOVE AND SEX IN THE ANCIENT WORLD
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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World <i>Monica S. Cyrino</i>	1
Part I: Screening Love and Sex in Ancient Myth and Literature	
1 G. W. Pabst's Hesiodic Myth of Sex in <i>Die Büchse der Pandora</i> (1929) <i>Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr.</i>	11
2 <i>Kiss Me Deadly</i> (1955): Pandora and Prometheus in Robert Aldrich's Cinematic Subversion of Spillane <i>Paula James</i>	25
3 Perversions of the Phaeacians: The Gothic <i>Odyssey</i> of <i>Angels & Insects</i> (1996) <i>Meredith Safran</i>	39
4 Woman Trouble: True Love and Homecoming in Pedro Almodóvar's <i>Volver</i> (2006) <i>Corinne Pache</i>	55
5 Sappho and Pocahontas in Terrence Malick's <i>The New World</i> (2005) <i>Seán Easton</i>	69
6 Soul Fuck: Possession and the Female Body in Antiquity and in Cinema <i>Kirsten Day</i>	85
7 Ancient Allusions and Modern Anxieties in <i>Seven Brides for Seven Brothers</i> (1954) <i>Christopher M. McDonough</i>	99

CHAPTER 5

SAPPHO AND POCAHONTAS IN TERRENCE MALICK'S *THE NEW WORLD* (2005)

Seán Easton

The New World (2005), Terrence Malick's fourth film, retells the story of the seventeenth century Powhatan woman, Pocahontas, and her involvement with the Jamestown colony.¹ It features prominently the ahistorical love affair with John Smith that has become a staple of the Pocahontas myth tradition.² Although viewers have found allusions to the epic poetry of Homer and Vergil in *The New World*, the presence and purpose of Sappho's erotic verse remains unexplored.³ As we shall see, *The New World* is very much rooted in a male-centered, classical epic tradition, yet in two scenes central to her relationship with Smith, Pocahontas delivers lines from Sappho in her own voice and as her own sentiment.⁴ The normative reflex of epic is to relegate a woman in Pocahontas's position either to the role of victim, however sympathetic, or possession. Malick uses Sappho to develop a model of female amatory consciousness that is necessary for Pocahontas's evolution into the protagonist.

Malick's allusions to Sappho in characterizing Pocahontas correspond to four aspects of her poetry. First, Sappho depicts the contingencies of desire from a female perspective both in and out of the context of marriage. Second, Sappho explores the relationship of desire to loss, abandonment, and despair. This resonates with a major priority of the film: to represent Pocahontas's experience of desire as a good thing in and of itself, rather than a lapse for which she must suffer punishment. Instead, she survives, matures, and loves again.

Third, Sappho (in fragment 16) makes Helen the model of a woman who acts according to her own desire, in contrast to her representation in Homeric epic and male-authored lyric. Although Malick does not directly allude to the poem in which this portrait appears, it nonetheless offers in miniature a template for connecting female desire to agency. The Homeric Helen possesses a distinctive voice and attributes agency to herself, but Homeric males as a whole treat her simply as an object of desire, albeit an incomparable one. They do not blame her for the war, but in not doing so they deprive her of agency.⁵ Among male lyric poets, Ibycus treats Helen after the fashion of Iliadic males. He objectifies her as a prize to be won without responsibility for her presence in Troy.⁶ The poet Alcaeus does blame Helen for her conduct while ignoring her beauty and, in the process, the basis for her fame. She becomes simply a female transgressor.⁷

Sappho's Helen proves more complex. Though by no means an uncomplicatedly positive figure, she retains her agency, beauty, and fame.⁸ She becomes, as one scholar has put it, "the hero of her own story."⁹ Likewise, *The New World* centers on the evolution of Pocahontas as a desiring subject.

Last, Sappho's poetry depicts a mentoring relationship between a female deity and a mortal woman, which is characterized by both intimacy and a religious sensibility. In Sappho's poetry and *The New World*, this relationship overlaps with that of Muse to poet. Yet it also serves as an index of the mortal woman's narrative stature. The film unfolds in the context of a dialogue between Pocahontas and a deity, whom she addresses as her divine Mother. She knows that this divine spirit is omnipresent, but she wishes her to become directly manifest. She associates the Mother at first with John Smith, and then finally locates her in Thomas, her son with John Rolfe.

DESIRE IN AND OUT OF MARRIAGE

Sappho is particularly associated with a type of poem called the *epithalamium*, which celebrates a young woman's passage from girlhood to womanhood through the institution of marriage. This association is especially suited to *The New World*, in which the marriage motif explores the possibility—ultimately to be lost—of reconciliation between the Old World and the New.¹⁰ Which of Sappho's poetic fragments belong to the genre of *epithalamium* is itself a matter of scholarly debate. Two of the three Sapphic fragments to which Malick alludes (51 and 130) are definitely not marriage poems, and the third (fragment 31) is likely not either. Yet in *The New World*, all three

reinforce an epithalamic theme. As the film moves from opening credits to main narrative, viewers hear Pocahontas speak in voice-over addressing the divine Mother:

Dear Mother . . .
 You fill the land with your beauty
 You reach to the end of the world.
 How shall I seek you?
 Show me your face.
 You, the great river that never runs dry.

As we hear these words, we see a trio of female swimmers enjoying themselves in the waters. They are young, nude, and joyful. The erotic character of the scene is undeniable, though the context of the scene is not directly sexual. A low angle shot from below the water's surface shows Pocahontas greet the swimmers on shore. Then we see her again, partially nude, perhaps suggesting that she had joined them.¹¹ At this moment the English ships appear in the bay, one of which carries her future lover, John Smith.

The music accompanying this scene is the prelude to Wagner's *Rheingold*, in which three Rhine maidens swim happily together, just before the Nibelung dwarf, Alberich, discovers them. When they realize he desires them, they each in turn mock him. Embittered, Alberich steals the Rhine gold that the maidens are charged to protect and forswears love, which—he has learned from them—is the price he must pay for using the gold to rule the world.¹² Similarly, the Jamestown colonists will search obsessively for gold and Smith will give up the love of Pocahontas in exchange for the opportunity to win fame through further voyages of discovery. Malick's musical analogy of the swimmers to the Rhine maidens and, by implication, the hardly less beautiful John Smith (Colin Farrell) to Wagner's lustful dwarf, highlights first the sufficiency of the three female characters among themselves, neither needing nor wishing for male attention; and second, the formal entry of the (European) male gaze and, with it, anticipation of the terrible historical outcome of the encounter.¹³

What viewers see, however, in the swimmers montage, is beauty and freshly present sexual maturity, all amid an atmosphere of innocence. The divine Mother, to whom Pocahontas prays, infuses the world—and the film as well, in her Muse-like capacity—with the beauty that the swimmers embody in human form. As viewers watch from their underwater perspective, the swimmers spin, dive, and describe

arcs and lines with their bodies. Two of them hold hands as they move beneath the water's surface. If the fact that the swimmers are all female is neither a simple replication of Wagner's scenario, nor a mere multiplication of bodies, what is to be made of this moment? There is nothing to imply a sexual relationship between the two swimmers, yet the context in which they take pleasure in their bodies and surroundings is certainly eroticized.

The tension between innocence, experience, invasive lust, and the moral choices of the viewer's eye is all the more keenly felt due to the age of the actor Q'orianka Kilcher, who plays Pocahontas and who was 14 years old at the time of filming. Her age appears to be a compromise between that of the real Pocahontas—11 years old, though the historical Smith reports her as 10—and the nearest plausible age for a romantic relationship.¹⁴ This is also the age at which a young Greek woman would marry, a detail that makes Sappho's poetry all the more important to the characterization of Malick's Pocahontas. It contributes a language concerned with the development of female amatory consciousness in a premodern, patriarchal context whose norms parallel—for the purposes of the movie—those of her own time and place.

In this way, the swimmers montage suggests the air of erotic tension and sexual innocence in epithalamic poetry that marks the young Greek girl about to depart from the company of her age and gender peers and make the transition through marriage into adulthood. It also recalls a challenge that Sappho's poetry poses to her readers. The collection of her surviving fragments includes poems of desire as well as celebrations of marriage, but which is which? Since almost all her poetry survives in incomplete form, how do we decide when she offers praise to a bride or to a woman she herself desires?¹⁵

To press the point still further, what are the potential satisfactions implied in Sappho's expressions of same-sex desire, if that is what one takes them to be? Do we understand Sappho to refer to a fully realized emotional and physical relationship with another woman? The swimmers montage offers a powerful portrait of the sensual. The joined hands of the swimmers express a form of sensual pleasure between two members of the same sex. Yet, rather than indicate a relationship that either involves or excludes genital contact, it presents a moment of undefined sensuality. The scene as a whole challenges viewers to parse further what the erotic means for Pocahontas, while hinting that to do so is to impose foreign categories and distinctions.

As if to underscore the power of one's cultural context to limit perspective, Malick's Smith arrives as a prisoner in the ship's hold,

blinking through a hatch at the sky. The expedition's first communal act on shore is to be his execution, but he receives pardon at the last moment. A low angle shot lingers on the empty noose as the reprieved Smith walks away from what was to be the scene of his death. Soon thereafter, Smith, an experienced military man, is entrusted with the task of making contact with a powerful monarch—Powhatan, ruler of the Powhatan people—who can assist the colony.

Powhatan's warriors capture Smith *en route* and bring him to their capital, Werewocomoco, where he is granted an interview with the king and his brother and advisor Opechancanough. At a certain point, Smith is seized and warriors rush in with their clubs upraised. Yet no sooner does he brace himself for death (again) than Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, intervenes and Smith's life is spared once more. The community now welcomes him and, although he is not permitted to leave for a period of some weeks, Smith is otherwise free to roam about the town. During this time he and Pocahontas become close and, shortly before he is returned to Jamestown, they acknowledge their love for each other.

The final scene of Smith's stay at Werewocomoco is one of the most beautiful moments in the film. Pocahontas addresses her divine Mother in voice-over, seeking after her and describing the transformation she feels in herself and her relationship to all about her. This sequence echoes the swimmers montage in its repetition of Wagner's *Rheingold* prelude. In this sequence Pocahontas delivers a line of Sappho and concludes the *epithalamium* that she began in the film's opening sequence:

Mother . . .
Where do you live? In the sky? The clouds? The sea?
Show me your face.
Give me a sign.
We rise, we rise.
Afraid of myself.
A god, he seems to me.
What else is life but being near you?
Do they suspect?
Oh, to be given to you . . . you to me.
I will be faithful to you. True.
Two no more.
One.
One.
I am.
I am.

Figure 5.1 Pocahontas (Q'orianka Kilcher) considers the nature of love in *The New World* (2005). New Line Cinema.

We witness a flow of images accompanying her words—a temple to the divine Mother, Pocahontas worshipping with other Powhatans, her mortal mother, birds in flight, a sky illuminated by lightning. Her voice transforms these images into the visual record of her inner experience, adding an aura of erotic desire to the relationships of community, nature, and spirit that the imagery symbolizes. The joyful sufficiency manifest in the swimmers montage reappears now in Pocahontas's relationship to Smith.

The seventh line of this address—"A god, he seems to me"—delivered in an erotic context is an unmistakable allusion to the opening of Sappho, fragment 31. This poem is especially famous; most notably, the Roman poet Catullus adapted it as an expression of his own (male) desire. As we shall see, Malick's allusion represents a different form of appropriation insofar as he, by implanting these lines into Pocahontas's inner dialogue with her divine Mother, replicates the relation of Sappho to the female addressee.

The allusion, taken alone, deepens the power and resonance of Pocahontas's declaration of love, while enhancing its sense of the timeless and mythic. Yet the resemblance to Sappho's poem goes further. Here is the first stanza and a half of Sappho's poem:¹⁶

He seems to me equal to the gods
That man who sits across from you

And listens closeby
To your sweet speaking
And lovely laughing—truly it
Sets my heart fluttering in my breast.

Fragment 31 contains the speaker, a female addressee, and, sitting near her, a male third party. Pocahontas's speech likewise contains three figures, though here, they consist of a speaker and, seemingly, two addressees. The first is the divine Mother and the second is Smith, though it is significant that he is never named as such.

The cinematic montage emphasizes Pocahontas, Smith, and the Mother deity, reinforcing the sense of a triangle of desire. It depicts Smith smiling and laughing with Pocahontas, offering visual, rather than verbal, recollection of Sappho's reference to "your sweet speaking / And lovely laughing." Its effect on Pocahontas, akin to that of the addressee's laughter on Sappho's speaker, is the transport of joy that registers in her voice-over and the exuberant imagery that accompanies it.

The speaker in Sappho's poem appears, in the first line, to desire this man who is like a god, but it is quickly revealed that her appreciation is reserved for the young woman with whom he sits. Furthermore, the man resembles a god exactly because he is so fortunate as to sit with the woman whom the speaker desires. Pocahontas's response to Smith in combination with her desire for the Mother deity creates its own triangle. She begins the voice-over with an address to her divine Mother. After asking her where she lives, she proposes several likely places, then says, "A god, he seems to me." After this point, the address seems to shift toward Smith, but she has in fact not ceased her prayer to the Mother. Rather, the scene suggests that Pocahontas believes that this deity is to be found in John Smith and, for this reason, he seems godlike to her.¹⁷

This is both like and unlike Sappho. She does not suggest that there is any desire for the man in her poem, only for the woman. Where the desire of Sappho's speaker for the woman is erotic or, at least, eroticizing, Pocahontas's for Smith is also a longing for union with her Mother, the embodiment of all the world's beauty and generative power. For her, the erotic represents a path to this union. The blending of her address to this Mother and to Smith does not suggest the subordination of her erotic feelings for Smith to a higher love for the goddess, but that the two loves share the same space. To be near him, she feels, is to be near Her.

At this stage of the story, however, Pocahontas feels herself draw nearer to the Mother as her relationship to Smith moves from the

emotional to the physical. At this moment, she articulates her feelings and the nature of her union with Smith and, through him, to the Mother: "I am, I am." This also recalls Walt Whitman's poem *One Hour to Madness and Joy* (line 15):¹⁸ "O to have the feeling, to-day or any day, I am sufficient as I am!"

Yet, in Malick's adaptation, it is a feeling accomplished, rather than merely desired. Further, these words evoke the name of the Hebrew deity—Yahweh, or "I Am Who Am"—and make for a significant close to a speech addressed to a goddess on the subject of divinity. The fullness and joy that Pocahontas feels in her oneness with Smith and her Mother find expression in the same words. When Smith leaves her, she says, "You have killed the god in me." Not only is the god ultimately not in him; he destroys it in her, however temporarily.

Pocahontas's declaration of Smith's resemblance to the divine unites her relationship to the goddess and the erotic context of the prayer accompanying the swimmers montage with the speech in which she quotes from Sappho 31. Together, these scenes form an ode reminiscent of a marriage hymn. In its first half, the swimmers montage introduces the viewer to a young girl in the society of her gender peers, after which moment the groom arrives. In its second half, Malick's allusion to fragment 31 explores the complex nature of Pocahontas's desire for Smith.

As an *epithalamium* embedded in the film, it celebrates what is, in Pocahontas's view, a marriage—Smith does not take it as such, or if he does, it proves the lesser of his concerns. Pocahontas's words in the previous speech also recall Whitman (*One Hour*, line 7): "O to be yielded to you, whoever you are, and you to be yielded to / me in defiance of the world!"¹⁹ In Whitman's poem, the lines that precede these support an epithalamic theme (*One Hour*, lines 5–6): "O savage and tender achings! . . . I tell them to you, for reasons, O bridegroom and bride."

DESIRE AND LOSS

The film moves next to the English fort and Smith's return. The fort is bleak and full of starving colonists. The transition could not be starker. Smith learns that he has been tried *in absentia* and sentenced to death yet again, but as the president of the colony attempts to carry out the sentence with his pistol, he is killed and Smith is made his successor. The chain of office he receives evokes the earlier image of the empty noose.

Overwhelmed by its wretchedness, Smith flees the fort on the pretext of seeking new trading partners for the colony and soon reunites

with Pocahontas. His inner dialogue recalls Pocahontas's thoughts in her Sapphic speech: "What else is life but living there." For Pocahontas, the issue is proximity to her beloved, and so her question is "What else is life, but being near you?" For Smith, the issue is place. He can live one way in one place, but not in another. It is in this that we see how Malick's Sapphic template redefines the film's epic identity. The heroic trial to be endured in this story is the quest to become and remain, both in spite of and through desire, a whole person who lives in a community despite the sufferings that differences of place can impose. At Smith's departure for the fort, Pocahontas again meditates on her desire in voice-over. Her words are addressed, as before, to the divine Mother: "My mouth is dry. My body trembles. My skin burns. I have two minds."

There are three poems of Sappho in play here. Pocahontas resumes the narrative of fragment 31. Sappho goes on to enumerate the places on her body that love has afflicted, as she looks at the young woman whom she desires and the man next to her: "tongue breaks and thin / Fire is racing under skin." And "shaking grips me."²⁰ Desire afflicts Pocahontas in like fashion: mouth, fire on the skin, and trembling body.

Pocahontas then sums up her experience: "Love has unbound my limbs. This love is like pain." The line "Love has unbound my limbs" is C. M. Bowra's translation of the first line of fragment 130.²¹ The next, "This love is like pain," appears to be a variation on the second line of the same fragment, where Sappho describes *eros* as, in Bowra's translation, "a monster bittersweet and my unmaking." Malick has arranged his allusions so that the evocation of joy comes in the first Sapphic voice-over (her "god" speech) and the disorienting physical and mental effects in the second. We have seen in the former the sweet side of this love. Now comes the bitter—"like pain." Last, "I have two minds" is a translation of fragment 51: "I do not know what to do; I have two minds."²²

SUMMONING THE GODDESS

While the swimmers montage alludes to the context of the *epithalamium*, there remains another Sapphic mode in which to consider this scene. Scholars have already identified the first words of *The New World* as reminiscent of a Homeric invocation of the Muse: "Come, Spirit. Help us sing the story of our land. / You are our mother. We, your field of corn."²³ Although much remains to be said about this aspect of the film's classical coordinates, it is also important to keep in mind the invocation's nonepic dimensions.

To seek the divinity's help in narration is consistent with epic practice, but to ask that it leave its place and come to one's side is the province of *kletic*, or "summoning" song. Sappho's collection of poems begins with a *kletic* hymn (fragment 1). As does Pocahontas, Sappho addresses the deity, inviting her, then explaining how and why she should come: "Intricate, undying Aphrodite, snare-weaver, child of Zeus, I pray thee, / do not tame my spirit, great lady, with pain and sorrow. But / come to me."²⁴ Sappho articulates her own privileged relationship to a goddess. She does not address her as mother, but in fragment 1 she calls her "comrade-in-arms" (line 28) and in fragment 2 invites Aphrodite to join her celebratory troupe of young women pouring nectar at a religious festival (lines 13–16).

A divinity addressed in this way may still play the Muse's role, as Marilyn Skinner argues that Aphrodite does in Sappho's first poem.²⁵ Yet the goddess does not act here as the authoritative arbiter of memory, after the fashion of the Muse of epic. Rather, she joins in the audience, infusing both it and the poet with inspiration for the song at hand. When she arrives, Aphrodite asks a question, as though part of the audience: "Sappho, who wrongs you?"²⁶ The answer to this question explains the reason both for the summons and the poem itself. Pocahontas speaks intimately to her Mother, but the answer is not given in easy conversational fashion. It falls to Pocahontas to recognize for herself, at the conclusion of her brief life's many experiences, the answer to her question, "Where are you?" Not until then does she find the divine Mother in Thomas, her son with John Rolfe.

THE HERO OF HER OWN STORY

Epic is the political genre of the Greco-Roman world *par excellence* and also the category to which one intuitively assigns movies about culture heroes and wars of foundation. One may envision *The New World* as an *Odyssey* in which John Smith comes to Virginia as an Odysseus figure, yet passes that mantle to Pocahontas who makes her own great journey, not only into the life of the English settlers in Virginia, but to England itself.²⁷ Still more, it resembles Vergil's *Aeneid*, in which Smith, a would-be Aeneas, misses his opportunity to become the symbolic founder-ancestor of a new Roman nation born, like the old, of two peoples. In his stead, Pocahontas emerges as a very different progenitor. In support of this conception of her character is the comment of Russell Schwartz, president for marketing at New Line Cinema: "Terrence said to me very early on, 'This is our original mother,' meaning that her journey is that of America itself."²⁸

The epic dimension of the film makes Sappho's voice necessary, for she offers a broader horizon of gender possibilities than does any other Greek or Roman author, while remaining within the confines of premodern patriarchy. Furthermore, the adaptation of her voice from classical antiquity establishes a sense of cultural consistency in the dialogue between the film's approach to gender and that of the epic tradition on which it draws. The result is that Pocahontas grows within and, eventually, beyond a traditional epic role to develop a perspective that envisions, evaluates, and selects from possible destinies. In the course of these experiences, she rejects self-destruction and loss of original identity.

It is Pocahontas's navigation both of her desires for John Smith and John Rolfe and of the consequences of each relationship that enables her to play the protagonist's part. Smith is the obvious competitor for this position, but he loses it through his refusal to acknowledge his desires or to confront their consequences. Instead, by making the traditional epic hero's choice to continue his quest, he forfeits his role as protagonist.

For his characterization of John Smith, Malick draws on Vergil's *Aeneid*, the signature epic of the Roman tradition, much as he employs Sappho's verse for Pocahontas. The first words heard from Malick's John Smith in the film are these, delivered in voice-over: "How many lands behind me? How many seas? . . . What blows and dangers? Fortune ever my friend." These lines draw on Robert Fitzgerald's translation of Vergil's *Aeneid*. They come not from Aeneas, but from his deceased father, Anchises, who awaits his son's visit to the Underworld. At his approach, Anchises utters this address: "I greet you now, how many lands behind you, / How many seas, what blows and dangers, son! / How much I feared the land of Libya / Might do you harm."²⁹

Anchises worried about Libya, because Aeneas was in love with Dido, its queen, and seemed ready to abandon his quest. By making these lines part of Smith's internal dialogue, Malick implants in him an intuition that plays the part of an epic father figure concerned for his son's glory. This connection is unsurprising. There has been a Vergilian presence in the Pocahontas tradition since 1801, when John Davis published his romanticizing version of the tale, comparing Pocahontas to Dido. When Aeneas and his followers, fleeing the Greek destruction of Troy, are washed up on the shores of Libya, Dido gives them refuge. The goddess Venus, Aeneas's mother, seeks to protect her son by making Dido fall in love with him. She also arranges for Jupiter to insist that he leave Carthage to pursue his destiny of founding a new

people in Italy, which later on down the generations will become the Roman nation.

When Aeneas leaves, Dido despairs and commits suicide. Aeneas's quest leads him to the Underworld to seek counsel from his deceased father. There he encounters the ghost of Dido in the company of her first husband, whose murder originally drove her to Libya where she founded the city of Carthage. Aeneas greets her, expressing shock and sadness at finding her there. Years after Smith leaves Virginia, Pocahontas—now Rebecca Rolfe—visits England in the company of her husband, John Rolfe. While there, she encounters John Smith, whom she had thought dead. Davis characterizes Pocahontas's reaction to seeing him by repeating Dido's response to Aeneas in the Underworld: "Turned away, she kept her eyes fixed upon the ground."³⁰ Malick accepts Smith as an Aeneas figure, but emphasizes Pocahontas's difference from Dido through her resilience in the face of loss and duplicity, whereas Davis's quotation from the *Aeneid* reduces her to silence.

Pocahontas's declaration, "A god he seems to me," offers a useful point of departure for appreciating Malick's film as a Sapphic epic. "God-like" is a standard epithet in Homeric epic, marking the superiority of one mortal over others.³¹ In both fragment 31 and *The New World*, resemblance to a god characterizes an attractive male, for whom another, more compelling object of desire is substituted. The Homeric echo in fragment 31's "like a god" resounds still more strongly in fragment 16.

This poem is important to the broader significance of Sappho for *The New World*. It offers a model for approaching the content and concerns of the Iliadic tradition while keeping Helen at its center. The speaker of the poem finds in Helen an analogy for her own experience of desire (fragment 16, lines 1–8).³²

Some say a host of horsemen, others of foot soldiers,
And others of ships, is the most beautiful thing
Upon the black earth, but I say it is
Whatever one loves.
It is entirely easy to make this understood
By everyone: for she who by far surpassed
All humankind in beauty, Helen,
Left her very noble husband,
And went sailing off to Troy
With no thought at all for child or dear parents
But she was led astray by . . .

Although Malick does not quote from this poem directly, it merits attention insofar as it draws together the ideas broached in his allusions to Sappho's god-like man, her characterizations of desire, and the relationship of both to the context of Pocahontas's story. The fragment's brief narrative of Helen offers parallels to the film in that both women abandon their communities for a foreign visitor. Unlike Helen, Pocahontas does not provide the occasion for her people to go to war. Nevertheless, in the film's version, the help she gives Smith prevents the Powhatan from eliminating the English colony before the arrival of the personnel, weaponry, and supplies that allow its preservation.

For Sappho's Helen and Malick's Pocahontas, desire informs their decisions. Force may swirl about them, but they choose where they go. In neither case, however, does this attribution of agency serve as a basis for their condemnation or removal to supporting roles in the stories of male lovers. Pocahontas's father exiles her for her actions, and she confesses to her uncle, late in the film, to having made "many mistakes." Even here, she is allowed to address the issue. Most important, the man who resembles a god does not have final authority to determine what Pocahontas does with her desire. Likewise, to look at the film through the lens of fragment 16, Smith's epic world with its troops and ships does not command her attention. What, or whom, one loves and why are the questions on which the film turns. Accordingly, when Smith abandons love, he drops from the film. When he returns briefly, it is to comment on that abandonment.

Film scholar Lloyd Michaels identifies four types of story in *The New World*: epic, creation myth, love story, and personal story.³³ Malick's Sapphic voice unites these four dimensions, combining allusions to a male-centered epic tradition and Sappho's woman-centered erotic lyric. These allusions open narrative directions that enable Pocahontas to experience the passion and loss characteristic of the abandoned women of epic, yet to emerge, without any sense of anachronistic gender identity, as the protagonist of a revisionist epic of desire and discovery.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Monica Cyrino, as well as Yurie Hong, Sean Cobb, Owen Goslin, Robert Kendrick, Laura Maki, and Kjerstin Moody for their valuable comments on this chapter.
2. On the historical Pocahontas's names, see Rountree (2006) 37–38. No name for her character is mentioned in the film until she is baptized and takes the name Rebecca.

3. Sappho is a female poet of love, desire, and marriage, who composed on the Greek island of Lesbos around 600 B.C. On possible allusions to Homer in *The New World*, see MacDonald (2009) 91–92 and Walden (2011) 197, 209 n. 2. On allusions to Vergil and other authors, see autochthonous88 (2008a). Although this video does not mention Sappho, another on the same channel (2008b) features an episode with the phrase “Eros the Bittersweet” in its title, which is a direct quotation from Sappho (fragment 130).
4. The version of *The New World* released in theaters (135 minutes) was issued on DVD in 2006. All references in this chapter, however, are to the 2008 extended edition (172 minutes). This version restores much that was cut from the theatrical release. The second of the two scenes in which direct allusions to Sappho appear is featured only in the 2008 extended edition.
5. Blondell (2010) 351–52.
6. Blondell (2010) 364.
7. Blondell (2010) 354.
8. On the figure of Helen in Sappho’s poetry, see Blondell (2010) 373–87.
9. duBois (1996) 88.
10. Sinnerbrink (2011) 190.
11. On the composition of the scene, see Sinnerbrink (2011) 187.
12. Sinnerbrink (2011) 195–96, n. 22.
13. Morrison (2007) 200 argues that the issue of colonial conquest is present throughout, even “underlying the film’s most radiant idylls.”
14. On Pocahontas’s age, see Rountree (2006) 36.
15. For an introduction to Sappho, see Ormand (2009) 37–45. On the issue of sexuality in Sappho’s poetry, see Hallett (1996) and Stehle (1996).
16. All texts of Sappho are from Campbell (1982). The translation here is by Monica Cyrino.
17. Wall (2011) 74.
18. autochthonous88 (2008a). See Blodgett and Bradley (1965) 106.
19. autochthonous88 (2008a). See Blodgett and Bradley (1965) 106.
20. Translated by Carson (2002) 63.
21. Higham and Bowra (1938) 211.
22. The translation is mine.
23. MacDonald (2009) 91–92.
24. Translated by Winkler (1990) 167.
25. Skinner (2002) 64.
26. The translation is mine.
27. Bleasdale (2011) 50. Bleasdale observes that Pocahontas is presented as the successful explorer, and Smith the failed one.
28. James (2005).

29. autochthonous88 (2008a); Fitzgerald (1981) 184. In Fitzgerald’s translation the passage occurs at 6.927–30, while in Vergil’s Latin text it is 6.692–94 (Mynors 1969).
30. *Aeneid* 6.469. The translation is mine. See Davis (1909) 292–93.
31. Page (1955) 21 n. 1.
32. The translation is by Monica Cyrino.
33. Michaels (2009) 85.