In chapter two, songs of love follow on from this view of Aphrodite, and her son Eros, the gods who were thought to initiate and/or manipulate erotic affairs in ancient Greece. Sappho's version of Aphrodite, and of love, is consistently female and revisionist, and her mode of expression points up a contrast with similar homoerotic episodes in male lyric songs. The form of erotic desire that is represented in Sappho's lyrics, the woman-to-woman love that has shocked/fascinated later scholars, is intriguingly distinctive. So in chapter three I proceed to investigate the specifics of a woman's desire and her response to, and treatment of, the site of sexuality, the body. Chapter four looks at another related and significant female matter, the contentious subject of virginity, and its representation in Sapphic songs. Beauty, of women, song and 'nature', is one of the central issues in Sappho's songs, and in chapter five I examine the unusual perspective revealed by her songs and the difference in gazes exchanged between women, as opposed to those directed by a male subject at a female object. The focus of religious, erotic and ritualistic interactions, the group of women that is often referred to as Sappho's circle, and the specifics of inter-relations between women, is the topic of the next chapter. This subject leads, in chapter seven, into more detailed discussion of the memorable and timeless rituals enacted within the circle, of the cyclic nature of 'woman's time'. In chapter eight I analyse Sappho's representations of the ritual which sometimes ends this female-oriented existence – weddings – which feature extraordinarily beautiful brides. These weddings are semi-public affairs, signifying as they do a transition between female and male territories, and Sappho's epithalamia and other songs appear also to feature in both these territories, competing with the poetic products of both public and private worlds, products which earned lasting renown for their creators. The two penultimate chapters deal with such matters as fame, poetic traditions, and a form of honour which is definably female. The concluding chapter examines the symbolic constructs which feature and recur most often in Sappho's songs, as well as in the preceding chapters. Again I engage in a process which compares these constructs and the world which they themselves construct, with other, later, symbols and symbolic worlds. My desire, however, is not just to compare, but to map, to re-present the woman-made world of Sappho of Lesbos.

Chapter 1

Aphrodite

Representations of the gods appear so frequently in Sappho's extant songs that it has been suggested that this community of women was dedicated to a religious cult.[1] Amongst invocations to the Graces, Muses, Hera and occasional references to male gods such as Hermes, one god figures most often and most significantly. Aphrodite, god of erotic love, craft and persuasion, is effectively reconstructed by Sappho's poetry into a figure with poetic, symbolic, even visual dimensions. In this many-sided format Aphrodite or Cypris features in a larger symbolic framework intrinsic in Sappho's poetry. This framework also centres on Aphrodisian characteristics: beauty, love and associated symbols such as the flowers that decorate her worshippers. Although it draws upon some constituents and mythic/poetic constructions of the public arena, this world and this representation of Aphrodite seem to be distinctively Sapphic and pervasively woman-centred. In Greek antiquity, hymns worshipping the gods and reports of their words and deeds were still formulated in the metres of an oral tradition. By then religious institutions were one of the few arenas in which women could act with some autonomy.

Was there a time when the status of female divinities of the Greek pantheon and their antecedents in Old Europe, Sumer and Egypt was more prestigious than it appears in later and more male-centred constructions?[2] Did Aphrodite have her beginnings in such a time and evolve as a deity created, to some extent, for and by women? Some of the female gods of other, geographically and culturally contiguous regions, the Sumerian Inanna, the many Semitic Ishtars and Ishtar-type figures and the Phoenician Astarte for example, share many of the characteristics and symbols

associated with Aphrodite: eroticism, fertility, astrality, goldenness, flowers, fruits, birds and water.[3] The worship of a powerful female god of love indicates/incites conspicuous differences in cultural and religious practices and attitudes; approval of female eroticism for example, or veneration of the symbols and stereotypes associated with that god and the women who dedicate themselves to her. Friedrich (1978: 103) has noted that many of the traditional, and Sapphically endowed, Aphrodisian characteristics fit perfectly, if stereotypically, into a 'feminine' gender scheme. I would add that, at least in a Sapphic framework, their value is paramount. Friedrich (1978: 110) also mentions the prominence of a tradition of women's poetry that flourished in archaic Lesbos and is evidenced by Sappho's songs. That evidence, the extant songs of Sappho, focuses on and re-creates this god suitably, beautifully, endowing her with poetic immortality, and with an accessible, erotic and powerful persona.

Sappho's prayer to Aphrodite, her only complete extant song, features an unusual combination of traditional form and idiosyncratic treatment. Genre-wise it is irregular; Kirkwood (1974: 111) cites it as the one 'example we have in monodic lyric of the cletic hymn'. This is only one aspect of its difference, its generic, genderic unaccountability. Sappho 1 features a woman's voice singing songs or prayers usually heard in a public arena, using the language of rhetoric and cult, but telling of past and present erotic experience, and of her close relationship with an immortal. Kirkwood (1974: 111) considers that 'the tone and the matter of fr. 1 are alien to worship'. In my opinion Greek religion is replete not with the dogma and creed we are accustomed to, but with mythical episodes glorifying and demonstrating the power of gods and their interactions with humankind. Sappho's prayer fits this criterion, just as its form duplicates the traditional sequence. It is a hymn which demands, confirms religious faith, but this poetic dedication, and the artistic techniques which model it, are constructed on woman-centred lines. Certainly there are few songs from male poets which resemble this dramatic, confessional, hymnal articulation of a singular version of eros. The scenario gives an impression of a prayer from suppliant to god, and the dialogue between these apparently unequal participants, one assured, empowered, the other ostensibly humble, reinforces this illusion.

Constructed in Sapphic stanzas, a metrical pattern which falls away on the final line of each stanza and is particularly satisfying

to the ear, this song uses all Sappho's euphonic tactics. Aurally and orally it flows musically (almost sensually), into gentle patterns, into distinct and thematically appropriate sequences of sound. Were its metrical and rhythmic components chosen by Sappho from a range of traditional Lesbian genres to fit a woman-oriented occasion because they were appropriate for the representation of female experience? Or did she adapt existing patterns, reshape them into what appears to be a distinctive mode of expression? Sappho apparently chose her consonants carefully, and considered which vowels would interact best in repetitive combinations that achieve the alliterative and musical effect she desired. It is noticeable that hard consonants such as β were eschewed, while liquids and vowels incorporating α and ο sounds proliferate, adding to the fluid movement, the mellifluousness of a distinctive mode of composition. Other oral features – repetition, rhyme and assonance – also contribute favourably to both the sense and sound of this erotic/cletic hymn. Whether by design or unconscious borrowing, the song also seems aurally and mythically reminiscent of Homeric verse. Another characteristic of oral poetry, a feature of its mnemonic design, is the manner in which rhythmic sequences, epithets and formulaic phrasing can be transferred from one context to another. It was customary for Greek poets to reuse these segments, along with the themes of oral verse and, in the process, to redefine them in line with contemporary trends. Arguably, Sappho 1, as a synthesis of old and new, a blend of male language and female creativity – the female appropriation and conversion of some elements of male culture – represents a remarkable illustration of this process.

The language of the first stanza, the invocation that forms the first stage of a traditional tripartite structure, is formal and elaborate, textually analogous to invocations from epics and hymns made by men.

ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτ' Αφρόδιτα,
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,
μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,
πότνια, θῦμον,

Throned in intricate splendour, deathless Aphrodite
child of Zeus, charm-fashioner, I entreat you,
do not, with grief and bitterness,
subdue my spirit, Mistress,

Men are more likely to address their pleas to male gods, as when Achilles solicits Zeus (*Iliad* 16.233–48), for the purpose of immortal intervention in a human battle. Sappho is composing within the frame of lyric, not epic, conventions, but Winkler (1981: 67) feels that she is 'articulating her own experience in traditional (male) terms'. He also suggests that 'Sappho's use of Homeric passages is a way of allowing us, even encouraging us, to approach her consciousness as a woman and poet reading Homer.' It seems to me that her creation of cult-type epithets, 'ποικιλόθρον' (1.1) and 'δολόπλοκε' (1.2), presents an illustration of this conjunction of male/female cultures. They are words which – in a careful reproduction of the correct phraseology – identify one particular mythological construct of Aphrodite. This divinity appeared to provide a focus for the Sapphic community. Her characteristic attributes and persona accorded with those of the author as well as relating to the singer's present predicament. Just as Zeus was the god of thunder, an awesome symbol of male hierarchical power, Aphrodite was the female symbol or force (the male symbol more frequently represented in male poetry was Eros) who incited/controlled erotic emotion.

The epithets used to describe her in Sappho 1 are not only idiosyncratic, a departure from traditional titles, they are also slightly duplicitous or ambiguous, each weaving double images of craft, intricacy and subtlety, an example perhaps of Sappho's many-mindedness.[4] Burnett translates them as 'blossom-clad' and 'snare-weaving', Page considers that they mean 'richly-enthroned' and 'weaver of wiles', differences which are reflected in each commentator's interpretation. Whether this Sapphic version of Aphrodite was in fact 'a richly devious divinity' (Burnett 1983: 249) or traditionally empowered as would be expected in an ordinary 'imitation of that type of ritual prayer' (Page 1955: 16) is significant. There is no doubt however, that for the singer, whose spirit is reported to have been subdued, once again, by the 'grief and bitterness' (1.3) of love, Aphrodite was the appropriate god to alleviate her suffering. Aphrodite was also represented as being the cause of these pangs, and the signs of distress which contribute to the persistent note of urgency that enlivens the song.

In his prayer to Zeus (*Iliad* 16.233–48), Achilles, as brave and proud as any epic hero, does not plead, nor does he mention his fear or torment, he merely articulates his present request. He also speaks in a solemn manner which appears typically direct and

masculine, a fit tone for a procedure which Bowra (1961: 200) surmises 'we might expect in a religion which allowed a considerable element of contract in the relations of gods and men'. Contracts between gods and women, if Sappho's prayer can be considered an example, are clearly different, more flexible, personal negotiations, to be discussed and then resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. Surprisingly, though apparently in accordance with the adversary relationships depicted in male lyrics, where omnipotent gods such as Zeus oppress powerless humans or an unwilling beloved is subjugated by a masterful lover, Sappho uses the verb 'δάμνα' – to tame, subdue, overpower (1.3) – to describe Aphrodite's influence.

Although Aphrodite's power is acknowledged, it becomes obvious that she may choose not to exercise it. Uncertainty is a vital aspect of this prayer, it is necessarily conditional: you are capable of subduing me, but if I enact a particular ritual correctly, skilfully, then perhaps, as on other similar occasions, you might aid rather than oppress me. Only faith can assure certainty in the illusory ambience that Sappho delineates. Men can be certain of the hierarchical nature of mortal/immortal interaction – a system which reproduces relations of dominance and submission, of kings/subjects, masters/slaves – and of myths constructed to explain and order the universe. Sappho, as a female myth-maker, appears deliberately to question, to subvert this order by her treatment and representation of the relationship between Aphrodite and the singer. After juxtaposing Aphrodite's strength with the singer's vulnerability, she then undermines not only this dichotomous structure but also a number of other conventional oppositions.

In the second stanza, after the singer asks Aphrodite to come to her, Sappho begins her version of the next stage of a cletic hymn, a persuasive delineation of the god's past deeds and epiphanies.

ἀλλὰ τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἴ ποτα κἀτέρωτα
τὰς ἔμας αὔδας ἀίοισα πήλοι
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα
χρύσιον ἦλθες

But come here to me, if ever before now
from far away you heard me calling
and descended, leaving your father's
house of gold,

Achilles, briefly (in a single line), reminds Zeus of the time he honoured him by greatly harming the Achaean army; Sappho lingers over five stanzas decoratively relating not only the assistance Aphrodite has given this lover in the past, but details of the sight and sound of her epiphanies. In this way she adds a sensual, almost tangible, dimension to an experience already touched with symbolic, ritualistic significance. Despite the economy of his depiction, Homer makes a clear distinction between Zeus' former intervention on behalf of Achilles and this present request, taking time to nominate the prior foe, and differentiate between the distant environment of this god and Achilles' earthly surroundings. Sappho dissolves such oppositions, conjoining this occasion with innumerable past requests, collapsing the illusion of separate instances; and bringing Aphrodite down from her father's house to a mortal setting, to face-to-face, verbal interaction with the lover/singer. Homer's Zeus is not described in sufficient imagistic detail to provoke a visual dimension, and he is not expected to descend to Achilles' level to honour him, he can smite Achilles' enemies with a thunderbolt from a heavenly realm.[5] Other gods enter the thick of human combat – even Aphrodite ventures to rescue her beloved son Aeneas (*Iliad* 5.331–428) – and is sent wounded and shrieking back to Olympus,[6] but throughout this and other epic representations, Zeus remains aloof. Despite distinctions between epic and lyric there are similarities between these two invocations. The hymnal form imposes specific restrictions upon each poet and each responds by providing the correct details, conforming to a particular sequence. The results, however, are discernibly different.

Not content with simply relating Aphrodite's manifestation in a past epiphany, Sappho moves into narrative mode to fill out that miraculous event, to embroider her offering imagistically. So that the portrait of Aphrodite as a glorious but beneficent deity becomes almost tangible.

ἄρμ' ὐπασδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον
ὤκεες στροῦθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας
πύκνα δίννεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνωἴθε-
ρος διὰ μέσσω,

αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,
μειδιαίσαισ' ἀθαντῳ προσώπῳ

ἤρε' ὄττι δηὖτε πέπονθα κὤττι
δηὖτε κάλημμι,

κὤττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλᾳ θυμῳ·

coming with chariot yoked; beautiful
swift sparrows leading you down to black earth
the pulse of countless fluttering wingbeats trembling
through mid-air,

swiftly then they came; and you, blessed lady,
smiling at me out of your immortal beauty
asked what was afflicting me this time,
why I was calling, this time,

what above all else I wished to befall
my maddened heart.

The emotional impulse in this section contrasts with less passionate sequences in male poetry and highlights the woman-centred scheme of values operating behind the song. The episode also produces a visual image, proof for the faithful, utilising details which are graphically precise, but infinitely general, since they are drawn from the host of mythical characteristics which define this immortal. It is also allusive, redeploying descriptive techniques often used in Homeric epics and hymns, although Sappho's choice of detail is again idiosyncratic, prompting the question of the degree of conscious subversive intent. Is Sappho, as Winkler proposes (1981: 61), deliberately reversing some aspects of the situation delineated, phallocentrically, by Homer in *Iliad* 5, and therefore 'adopting multiple points of view in a single poem'? Or is she undercutting traditional male symbols by allowing them to be juxtaposed with apparently inappropriate images? Aphrodite, who is Homerically *amachos*, is equipped in Sappho's prayer with a chariot, fostering male images of war. As it descends to the black earth, however, this divine equipage is seen to be drawn by sparrows, diminutive creatures who were, appropriately perhaps, associated with fecundity, and confirm Aphrodite's ornithic aspect,[7] but fall short when compared to teams of snorting stallions (eg. Zeus' team in *Iliad* 8.41–6 or Nestor's 'fast-footed horses', *Iliad* 8.116–29). The description of sparrows swiftly slipping through mid-air, their wings whirring – actions which are

conveyed through soft syllabic patterns: 'ὤκεες στροῦθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας / πύκνα δίννεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνωἴθε- / ρος διὰ μέσσω' (1.10–12) – is, however, extremely attractive. Is it in any sense also 'feminine'? Aphrodite arrives and, in line with her traditional reputation as the goddess of smiles, smiles at the singer.

After the lengthy formalities of the previous four stanzas and the renewed urgency of the lover's need, stressed by the repetition of 'this time', ('δηὖτε' 1.15, 16 and 17),[8] Aphrodite's appearance is magical, almost startling. It is a manifestation which must remind the audience of Aphrodite's persuasive trickery, of the attributes most needed by the singer. Without doubt it is also dramatically expedient, creating as it does, with the god's epiphany and the dialogue between her and the lover, a sensation of immediacy and intimacy. It becomes evident as the song develops that the problematic human relationship represented here is the latest of many, hence the slur of fickleness which this song has attracted. Along with the attitude that as these affairs are transient they must also be entirely light-hearted, and therefore represented ironically or playfully. Arguably, erotic emotion is not singular but pluralistic – grave and playful, agonising and delightful – and Sappho's representations of it foreground its multiple aspects. Poetically, these short-lived relationships are not dissimilar to affairs represented by the male poets who are not censored for their sexual inconstancy. And the reiteration of 'δηὖτε' (as a word combining now and then) appears to signify not changeability, but a continuum that incorporates similar past, present and future erotic situations.

When Aphrodite speaks she addresses the lover as Sappho, conjoining singer, lover and creator and increasing the impression of a personal statement.

> .... τίνα δηὖτε πείθω
> ἄψ σ' ἄγην ἐς ϝὰν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ
> 20 Ψάπφ', ἀδικήει;
>
> '... Who am I to persuade this time,
> who should I lead back to your love, who is it
> 20 Sappho, that hurts you?'

It is a statement which confirms some commentators' belief that women's poetry flows straight from the heart. As Stigers (1979: 465) reminds us, however,

> one must keep in mind that the 'I' of the poem is not necessarily the 'I' of the poet at all ... The original emotions themselves must have their stimulus in the poet's experience, but the process of clarifying them requires the poet to refine, transform, extrapolate experience imaginatively, perhaps beyond recognition.

Since I am in agreement with Stigers, I can only add that this song is an artistic production, not a true confession. The self-awareness implied by the identification does change the mood however, introducing a note of detachment. The singer has talked of her 'μαινόλᾳ θυμῳ' (1.18), a heart which, in the first stanza, she begged Aphrodite not to oppress. Aphrodite, in a disconcertingly intimate manner (like an intuitive confidante or mother-figure), suggests that her distress is caused by an unresponsive beloved and asks who is wronging her this time, who is refusing to partake of an experience that Stigers (1981: 51) describes as: the 'loveliness and joy, of contact with the divine, of (the) heightened self-awareness', concomitant with love and its symbol/goddess. In this passage, as Bowra (1961: 203–4) notes, there is a lack of 'the absorbing self-importance which makes for solemnity'. He considers that 'the whole episode is at a level of affectionate understanding'. It is true that although Aphrodite retains her divine status, the relationship between mortal and deity is shown to be unusually close, like epic relationships between immortal lovers and human beloveds which endow glory on the human participants and their offspring. In this instance however, it is more familiar and equitable, resembling an ideal woman to woman affiliation.[9] Sappho has much in common with Aphrodite. Aphrodite has the power to subdue all beings, but Sappho has the power to invoke her presence, and in their conversation each contributes part of the story, using similar language.

In the next stanza this mutuality is extended to include the two human protagonists in a speech resembling an incantation or a spell, as it evokes a sense of mystery that seems congruent with a world inhabited by gods, poets and lovers.

> καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει·
> αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει·
> αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει
> 24 κωὐκ ἐθέλοισα·

For if she flees, soon she will pursue;
if she does not accept gifts now, she will give them;
and if she does not love, soon she will desire
24 even against her will.

Aphrodite, or perhaps Sappho, dispenses comfort, since this list effectively dissolves the erotic inequities between the two human protagonists and reverses the situation. The language in this stanza, integrated as it is with repetition and assonance, divided/stressed by end rhymes and rendered impatient with the reiteration of 'ταχέως' (1.23), compounds the impression of a miraculous co-ordination, an inversion which causes both parties to be equally infected. Oppositions are, in this manner, integrated rather than contrasted. Of course the whole process is illogical and beyond rational explanation, but aurally and emotionally it soothes and provides comfort. Women have traditionally been associated with esoteric practices, and with a form of reasoning which is not logocentric.[10] This prayer is constructed in ways which clash with the codes inherent in the male hymns and narratives that provide an allusive background.

The final stanza (the last stage of a cletic hymn, the entreaty) brings us back from the generality of a remembered past event to the present of the song – now, this time – with a plea that is textually and emotionally reminiscent of the singer's initial invocation.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὄσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι
θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὔτα
28 σύμμαχος ἔσσο·

Come to me once again, set me free from bitterness
and concern, accomplish all that my heart
most desires to be accomplished, and you yourself
28 be my co-fighter.

The dreamlike aura is dissipated by this development, but the poetic sequence is satisfyingly circular, as other Sapphic songs no doubt would be if we had access to the complete text. Ring composition was one of the most frequently used structures of Greek antiquity, and the repetitions, the patterns of sound and sense that echo and connect throughout this song place it within this category. In this stanza however, despite the reiteration of some of the key words of the first stanza, such as 'θῦμος', 'ἔλθε',

and the repeated suggestion of longing and cruel anxiety, it is clear there has been a gentle progression. The resolution afforded by Aphrodite in that previous epiphany still echoes in the minds of her audience, assuring them that this petition will also be answered. The concluding image reinforces this impression. Sappho, in her roles of singer, poet, lover, has a further request, she wants Aphrodite herself 'ἔσσο' (1.28) to be her fellow fighter and she uses a martial expression – 'σύμμαχος', (1.28) to express that desire. An expression which, considering the recent demonstration of the equality of the human lovers, appears incongruous. It suggests a potential union between lover and god, one which is not dissimilar to that of Zeus and Achilles or Diomedes and Athene; but it also appears to postulate an adversary relationship between lover and beloved. Achilles' concise entreaty in *Iliad* 16, which also stresses the difference between past and present with 'καὶ νῦν', seems a less complicated reiteration.

Does Sappho's final petition include a reversion to erotic angst, in contrast to the ideal situation portrayed in the passage describing Aphrodite's epiphany? Does it refer defiantly to Aphrodite's manifold talents, insisting that her ability as a warrior is as great as her expertise in seductive wiles? This expression again draws a comparison between an ideal female relationship and the relations of dominance and submission which are an integral part of a male environment where words such as 'σύμμαχος' (1.28) and the relationships they represent, flourish and overpower. In antiquity Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Demosthenes* 40 [v. 214ss. Usener and Radermacher]) praised Sappho's craft in this prayer, her ability to combine words and sounds with the result that 'the verbal beauty and the charm of the writing lie in the cohesion and smoothness of the joinery'. Her ability to integrate a range of potentially disparate issues and mortal/immortal participants in a single song just as smoothly and cohesively suggests the kind of multiplicity that is at times associated with womankind. Perhaps her poetic skill also enabled her to include several interpretations, increasing the complexity, while retaining a sense of wholeness, like some poststructuralist representations which deliberately resonate with ambiguities, or play polysemously with a number of meanings.

The only song by a male author which can be compared with this complex religious/erotic song is an invocation by a later Ionian poet (well known in 536/5 BC), Anacreon of Teos. The

two songs are, however, noticeably different. The dissimilarities foreground anomalies between two representations of the most renowned love poets of the ancient Greek world, and in the attitudes to religion and eros constructed into their songs. Despite superficial divergencies, the sex of the protagonists, male in this case, female in Sappho 1, and some structural disparity, the scenario of Anacreon's song (fr. 357) is thematically similar. Both songs represent a plea to a god for intercession in an unfulfilled, homoerotic affair and it seems possible that Anacreon knew of Sappho's prayer and based his song on it, although the situation and the time when Anacreon sang his song are far removed from a Sapphic milieu. Anacreon's song was almost certainly meant for a courtly, possibly a sympotic occasion, for the amusement of a predominantly male audience.

Anacreon's love song densely and ironically compresses a wealth of tradition and emotion into a minimum of lines and reduces it to a single view which climaxes in an elegant joke. This single view is somewhat broadened by the number of gods invoked within the song. Like Sappho, Anacreon goes through a shorter, if more conventional sequence, addressing Dionysus and his immortal playmates with suitable epithets, then requesting his presence and stating the lover's case. Unlike Aphrodite, Dionysus – the one god who is directly addressed – does not make an appearance in the mortal context inhabited by the singer. Anacreon places him, with Eros, Aphrodite and some Nymphs, in a distant, immortal sphere, and although like the Sappho-singer his singer begs him to come, Dionysus remains tucked away out of sight in the background. If some contract was entered into between god and man then once again it was on a basis of male solidarity, in accordance with the hierarchical social strata often constructed into male lyric poetry, between a powerless mortal and a superior god who inhabited 'the lofty mountain peaks' ('ὀρέων κορυφάς' 357.5). The lack of actual godly presence and the absence of dialogue makes this song a straightforward announcement of desire, a plea for immortal intervention in a love affair in which the human participants remain as conspicuously separate as the petitioner and his god. Several other disparities distinguish this song from Sappho's prayer: the deft economy of Anacreon's language; the constant, lighter tone (which tends to neutralise the representation of personal torment and make love merely a game played by both mortals and immortals:

'συμπαίζουσιν' 357.4); the more detached perspective of a lover who seems to view Kleoboulus as an object; and the logical, less circular, sequence of thought: address, description, followed by a plea that is left hanging, unanswered.

Viewing each of these decorative songs we, as audience and/or readers, gaze at an antique representation of a request for godly intervention in erotic situations which are, in a number of ways, disparate. In their dramatic technique, in the assumption of masks, the practice of illusion, these poets also differ, not in complexity, for in this they are equivalent, but in tone and intent. Sappho, by naming herself, by representing emotion and religious belief, using dialogue that mimics normal speech and interaction, appears to discard the mask, to present a close imitation of 'lived experience'. Some commentators are struck by the artlessness of this poet, her ability to report the intensity of her own desires. The possibility that Sappho 1 was just as consciously and skilfully constructed as Anacreon's plea appears less acceptable. But Sappho's prayer seems in fact to be superlatively idealistic, a multidimensional product of artifice. Conversely, Anacreon, from a more detached and anonymous perspective behind the mask, appears to announce the artificiality of his prayer as he boldly proffers decorative images and epithets, not it seems as offerings for the gods, but as a richly ornamented gift for Kleobulus. Is sexual or gender difference an issue here? Concepts such as 'feminine' and 'masculine' cannot be easily comprehended when they are extracted from their original context, the field of representation and/or significance in which they were initially constructed and to which they relate, but skill, wittiness, and detachment have traditionally been considered 'masculine' attributes more likely to be found in the work of male authors than in the heartfelt 'feminine' outpourings of female poets.

There is one other fragment (288) of Ibycus, a contemporary of Anacreon who also spent some time at the court of Polycrates, which captures something of the sensuality, the hymnal quality of Sappho 1. It is again erotically directed at a beloved of the same sex, but the role of the immortals in this petition seems distinctive. Ibycus infers that the Graces, Seasons, Aphrodite and Persuasion have nurtured the beloved, Euryalus. Just as Sappho's prestige is enhanced by her association with, her likeness to, Aphrodite, the connection between these gods and personifications and Euryalus confers special favour upon him, so that the song seems more a

poetic compliment than a hymn. Rather than appealing to his group of deities for assistance, Ibycus simply bestows upon them descriptions or epithets of sensuous beauty and projects these qualities on to Euryalus. It is a deft process and light, irreligious, court-oriented as it is, Ibycus' fragment seems as gracefully artificial as Anacreon 357. Sappho's representation of her relationship with and her belief in one female god, her emotionalism, her combination of remembered and present incidents, her unusual treatment of traditional elements, are all factors that set her song apart from those composed by two poets from differently constructed socio-poetic contexts.

Sappho 2 is also a prayer, one which takes the form of a 'κλητίκος ὕμνος' and again centres around an invocation to Aphrodite and the relationship of this god with Sappho's community of women. Unfortunately, the fragment is less complete, making it difficult to discern its original form or purpose.

δεῦρύ μ' ἐκ Κρήτας ἐπ[ὶ τόνδ]ε ναῦον
ἄγνον, ὄππ[α τοι] χάριεν μὲν ἄλσος
μαλί[αν], βῶμοι δὲ τεθυμιάμε-
4 νοι [λι]βανώτῳ·

ἐν δ' ὕδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δι' ὔσδων
μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δὲ παῖς ὀ χῶρος
ἐσκίαστ', αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων
8 κῶμα κατέρρει·

ἐν δὲ λείμων ἱππόβοτος τέθαλεν
ἠρίνοισιν ἄνθεσιν, αἰ δ' ἄηται
μέλλιχα πνέιοσιν [
12 [ ]

ἔνθα δὴ σὺ .... ἔλοισα Κύπρι
χρυσίαισιν ἐν κυλίκεσσιν ἄβρως
ὀμμεμείχμενον θαλίαισι νέκταρ
16 οἰνοχόαισον·

Come here to me from Crete, to [this] sacred
temple. Here is your graceful grove
of apple-trees, and altars smoking
4 with incense

in here cold water murmurs through branches
of apple, and roses overshadow every part of

this place, and from quick-shivering leaves falls
8 a sleep of enchantment

in here also swells a meadow, grazing for horses
it blossoms with spring flowers, and the winds
11 breathe sweetly . . . [
[ ]

In this place. . . . Cypris, take up
the golden cups and pour into them, delicately
nectar that is intermingled
16 with our festivities.

This plea is also structured on conventional lines, but this time the section between invocations is dominated by a detailed description, not of the god or her epiphany, but of the human environment to which her presence is requested. Constructed in Sapphic stanzas, it contains some of her most melodious lines, in rhythms which are almost mesmeric. If, as Bagg (1964: 49) suggests, 'the rhythms and laws of sexual tension underlie several of Sappho's poems', then this song is stilled by a quietude of waiting, or pressing sensuality. Once more we are confronted with a mingling of the erotic and religious, an assimilation which is noticeably different from the love song/prayer portrayed in Sappho 1, but which still appears problematic for some scholars. Page (1955: 42) is prompted to remark that such songs must be 'records of personal experience, designed to be heard rather by mortals than gods, to be judged by the standards not of priesthood but of poetry'. Must erotic emotion and religious ritual, or priesthood and poetry necessarily be constructed into a scheme of oppositional pairs? Particularly as Sappho's song was composed during an era in which the accepted medium of all religious and hymnal material was poetic. This song purports to deal with communal festivity, not personal experience. The petitioner places herself in the background and there is no sense of the private anguish which disturbed Sappho's first prayer. Neither the singer nor her companions are identified and she sings of her desire, not for another mortal, but for the presence and participation of an immortal in a eucharistic ritual. Again that immortal is Aphrodite and again the traditional characteristics focused on by Sappho are suitable and significant. These characteristics are different, however, as is the manner of evocation; the diversity of Sappho's invocations to

Aphrodite is a further indication of her many-mindedness. Although this singer also requests an epiphany – persuasively, as befits a petition to the god of persuasion – her invocation is simply worded, reasonably bare of formulaic epithets and patronymics. There also appear to be fewer Homeric echoes in this hymn, and while some features of this garden might resemble the landscapes inhabited by gods during moments of erotic activity, the description and co-ordination of sacred/natural elements seem typically Sapphic.

In form and intention however, this hymn appears similar to Alcaeus' invocation to the Dioscuri (fr. 34), a song also constructed in Sapphic stanzas, composed in colloquial language, and likewise incomplete. Both singers address their chosen god/s familiarly, nominating the place they are to leave – in each case an earthly locality dedicated to their worship – and asking these divinities to 'come to me', ('δεῦρύ μ',' Sappho 2.1). Both of these Lesbian poets match Kirkwood's (1974: 86) description of Alcaeus 34 and achieve a striking 'combination of tradition and originality'. The gods and their epiphanies appear distinctive, however, as do the methods of poetic enticement. The tasks which these divinities are to perform, as well as the human environments they are to invigorate with their presence are accordingly disparate (since each of these contexts concurs with their traditional characteristics), adding to a range of differences which again parallel 'feminine/masculine' oppositions. Just as Sappho's Aphrodite exhibits characteristics which appear to befit a 'feminine' scheme, the gods represented by Alcaeus are endowed with 'masculine' talents: Castor, who is known as a tamer of horses, and physically fit Polydeuces, are divine horsemen, impetuous saviours of men who roam the earth performing athletic feats, delivering mortals from danger at sea or 'chilling' ('ζακρυόεντος' 34.8) death. In his song, whether referring to a politically allegorical 'ship of state' or an actual vessel, Alcaeus portrays a black ship which is swamped by dark storms and night, until it is rescued by the light[11] which is a relatively unconventional attribute of these brilliant twins. His images, particularly the oppressive power of dark storms, clash with Sappho's murmuring streams and quiet garden. The binary contrasts he draws, of mortal/immortal, strong/weak, sky/sea, dark/bright, are potent and effectively cohere the three stanzas which remain. Alcaeus also employs Homerisms such as 'broad earth' ('εὔρηαν χ[θόνα]' 34.5) and 'well-benched ships' ('εὐσσ[ώγ]ων νάων' 34.9) which not only add a further epic dimension, but also endow solemnity on a hymn which is already said to possess 'a serene dignity', and to be elevated by the ingenious, 'picturesque manifestation' (Page 1955: 266–7) of St Elmo's fire. The vivid movement of flaring light and leaping bodies that vitalises his prayer, and the contrasts inherent in it, seems also to introduce a natural/godly phenomenon that excites male imagination. Perhaps it is easier to relate to this form of ingenuity than to the unconventional religious/erotic combinations constructed into Sappho 2 – a garden, for instance, that is serenely, sensually attractive, but woman-centred in its orientation.

A description of the garden takes up a large portion of the remaining four stanzas of Sappho's second prayer. Beginning and ending as it does with requests to Aphrodite, this hymn seems again to retain a satisfying circularity, unlike the apparently logical progression of events in Alcaeus' prayer. It is also cohesive. Each section, every metrical and environmental component, and the relation of these components to the deity who is asked to officiate, contributes to a conjunction of 'natural' and traditional detail, of mortal/immortal interaction. Alcaeus constructed his hymn around a scheme of sharp, conventional oppositions and the contrasts clash effectively. There are no such dichotomous comparisons in Sappho's landscape. Mortal/immortal, natural/sacred and traditional/symbolic elements are merged into a pluralistic entity. This song, and the garden it gracefully delineates, are created to glorify a goddess or tempt her down to earth. To that end, conventionally but innovatively, it produces what Burnett (1983: 263) calls a 'portrait in which the goddess's best-known attributes and parts are rendered as bits of landscape . . . Gardens, apples, perfumes, roses, field-flowers and horses all serve to remind Aphrodite of herself, as she is worshipped in her various cults.'

The locality of Sappho's garden, the time of day when the ritual took place, are unspecified, and while the season seems to be springtime with the blossoming, potential fruitfulness typical of that season, it could as easily be late summer when apples ripen and trees spread shade. This external landscape also closes around itself, becomes an internalised and suitably protected territory, with the repetition of 'ἐν' at the beginning of the final three stanzas. Page (1955: 40) insists that 'the place is real, not imaginary'; McEvilley (1972: 328) seems equally certain that 'Sappho's geography is of the imagination'. Surely though, this landscape is

both real and imaginary, with elements that might be drawn from a store of mythological information and co-ordinated by Sappho's imagination, but also have a visual, tangible dimension. Through their links to Aphrodisian attributes the sacred/botanical/imaginative elements of the garden are endowed with traditional associations, and they each have a place in a metaphorical network of sexual images which allude to, or represent parts of, the female body. Rose bushes and apple trees cluster at the secret, shaded centre of this garden and while, in an antique vocabulary of sexual metaphors, *mêlon* equates to various clitoral objects, roses have often been linked euphemistically to female genitalia. Just outside this inner circle, flower-strewn, uncut meadows flourish, meadows which form a barrier between the garden and the outside world. Within Sappho's 'ἱππόβοτος' meadow, horses graze, calmly, they are one of the images connected with Aphrodite, but they can also be compared with the divine horses which are tamed, then ridden rapidly around the world by the Dioscuri in Alcaeus' hymn. More generally, as symbols of speed, mastery and prestige in male competitive arenas and battlefields, such glorious creatures possess a tremendously 'masculine' aspect.

Other components of Sappho's garden are also endowed with tangible characteristics. As she draws her word picture, paratactically, loosely, with *de*-clauses and few grammatical breaks, the images proliferate, develop into a visual representation. Other senses are also involved – smell, hearing, touch, even taste with the mention of the nectar that is mixed like wine with festivities and women – and the imagery flows in sensual undercurrents. The sensuousness is as physical as it is verbal and metaphorical. The air, the water, the patterns of light and shade, are constantly moving in this glade, causing these images to integrate, to unite and then disengage. As Burnett (1983: 264) notes, 'substance here tends to give way to insubstantiality'. 'Cold water murmurs through branches of apple' (2.5–6), 'roses overshadow every part of this place' (2.6–7) (flowers which have changed from colour to shade), and not only does incense spread from altars; from shimmering leaves, sleep falls ('κῶμα' 2.8), a deep sleep of enchantment which is presumably capable of infiltrating, altering any and all mortals gathered at the grove's arcane centre. Once more we are poetically transported to a realm of mystical power, into the influence of an erotic god who is capable of subduing

all creatures, and a poet who can subsume normal oppositions in her representations.

Composing some fifty years after Sappho, Ibycus produced a song (fr. 286) containing a description of a garden which bears some resemblance to Sappho's erotic grove. In Ibycus' garden, in a flourish of spring there are quince trees (another species of *mêlon*), flowing rivers, and 'vine-blossoms growing luxuriantly beneath the protection of shady vine-branches' ('οἰνανθίδες / αὐξόμεναι σκιεροῖσι ὑφ' ἕρνεσιν / οἰναρέοις θαλέθοισιν' 286.4–6). This place is described as 'the undefiled garden of the Virgins' ('Παρθένων κᾶπος ἀκήρατος' 286.3–4). With its flowing rivers and fruitful vines and trees, the scene manifests a relatively vigorous ambience, but the peace and potential fecundity of Ibycus' paradisiacal representation are not all that different to the atmosphere evoked in Sappho 2. Suddenly however, half-way through this short song, love enters upon the scene and irrevocably disrupts the serenity, showing it to be a temporary, contrived state, one side of yet another male scheme of binary oppositions. The switch is dramatically effective and is skilfully interwoven into the metaphoric background of the song, but the imagery which accompanies this metamorphosis is full of violence and disorder, of the madness which often attacks victims of eros. In Sappho 1 the singer also experiences 'μανόλᾳ θύμῳ' (1.18) but her distress is temporary and self-contained, and the decorative, comforting images of Aphrodite provide a positive counterbalance. Love is recognised as being agonisingly double-sided, but within the framework of Sappho 1 and other Sapphic contexts, sweet and bitter are confused and conjoined so that while the duplicity of eros is recognised, a relatively painless resolution is effected. In Ibycus 286, a love that saturates every image of the song appears to be either potential or virginal, in which state it is controlled, seasonal and tranquilly beautiful; or uncontrollable, unseasonable and punitive, a malicious onslaught.

The Cyprian, Aphrodite, is held responsible for some, if not all of these assaults, and her representation, like the presentation of the negative forces she apparently unleashes, is perceptibly different from Sappho's divine creation. As is the relationship between this version of Aphrodite, and the singer/lover: two adversaries caught up in an age-old battle that results in mortal debilitation. In fr. 286, as part of a male creation the god is associated not only with the madness that is a conventional

Aphrodisian attribute, but also with blazing north winds, dark storms and lightning bolts. (A scenario which appears similar to Alcaeus fr. 34, except there men are rescued by male gods, here a female god torments a male subject.) These malevolent blasts are portrayed shortly, powerfully, by epithets which are then condensed into a minimal metrical space. Ibycus' technique, and the contrasts contained therein, are compelling, but single-minded, and the song ends with one of its few personal references, an image of the human heart which is shaken from the roots by this actual/metaphorical battering. In spite of its effectiveness, the deliberate juxtapositioning makes this second set of images appear to be as poetically convenient, as detached and metaphorically oriented as the initial sequence.

But is this song phallocentric, male-centred in either its orientation or construction? In Sappho 2 smoke rises, breezes blow, water murmurs and sleep falls from shimmering leaves, but can these sensuous sounds and sights, and the technique which coheres them, be considered emblematic of some female or 'feminine' mode of discourse? It can only be stated that the comparison of these dreamlike movements with flowing rivers, blasting winds, rushing lightning and violently shaken hearts promotes awareness of difference, of the historically specific and conventional 'feminine/masculine' schemes which appear to be constructed into these songs. Considering that both poets are singing of the power of Aphrodite, however, the dissimilarity is startling.

At the centre of Sappho's grove, where smoking altars stand beneath apple trees and rose bushes, Aphrodite is requested, in the final invocation which unites the song structurally, to take golden cups and fill them delicately with nectar. In this way intermingling festivities, nectar and presumably both mortal and immortal celebrants. These celebrants are unnamed, undefined, as non-specific as the landscape they inhabit. Sappho implies their presence by mentioning cups and festivities. This earthly garden has become a symbol of Aphrodite and her presence dominates in the last remaining stanza. Whatever the purpose of the ritual, whoever its participants, this image concludes a process of integration that has occurred throughout the song. It is a process which amalgamates these celebrants and joins them with scenic elements that are associated with Aphrodite and integrated, piece by piece, in the previous stanzas. Mortal and immortal protagonists are again conjoined, and the combination of magical

substances – the drink of the gods and enchanted sleep – seems to add a concluding touch. Sappho's treatment of Aphrodite is again idiosyncratic, but it is also positive and traditionally correct. Her use of generic and metrical elements is equally precise. Despite this superficial conformity however, the resulting prayer with its coherent structure, its combination of symbolism, eroticism, enchantment and ritual, appears unique. Not just because it delineates an esoteric female festival, but because Sappho evokes that event skilfully, foregrounding its woman-centred ambience, using creative tactics which diverge from the techniques that construct other, more conventional, hymns.

The final tiny fragment (fr. 140a) that is directly addressed to Aphrodite is also concerned with a negative aspect of love and again centres on a male figure, Adonis, the beautiful young lover of Aphrodite.

καθνάσκει, Κυθέρη', ἄβρος Ἄδωνις· τί κε θεῖμεν;
κατττύπτεσθε, κόραι, καὶ κατερείκεσθε κίθωνας·

He is dying, Cytherea, delicate Adonis is dying. What are we to do?

Beat your breasts, girls, and tear your clothes.

Linked mythically to the natural world that is featured often in Sappho's songs, this semi-divinity was a vegetation-deity, said to be born from the myrtle-tree which became his emblem, and like other beautiful, ephemeral, beings he died every autumn and was reborn in the spring. Once again, by singing of the mythical union of Aphrodite and Adonis, Sappho destabilises the dichotomous construct usually inserted between gods and mortals. She seems to favour these stories of love, of god/mortal unions, and of erotic female empowerment.[12] This fragment also incorporates the earliest attested mention of the Adonis cult in Greek literature and is interesting in the way it links to a form of ritual activity that continues in ancient Greece and suggests the presence of a female counter-culture. In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (lines 387–96), and other representations, women are reported as shouting 'Beat your breasts for Adonis' at a women's festival called the Adonia during which, according to Winkler (1990: 188–91), women gathered on rooftops and 'indulged in hilarious obscenity' in 'an acceptable, if loud and riotous, women's rite'. Sappho composed other songs on this subject; (frr. 168 and 211) and fr. 211b(ii)

tell of Aphrodite's burial of Adonis in a lettuce-bed, another link with the Athenian Adonian celebrants who prepared gardens of lettuce and fennel in terracotta pots and then allowed the green shoots to wither and die. Since the anaphrodisiac properties of lettuce were well known in ancient Greece (Winkler 1990: 204), it seems that it is impotence as much as death that is mourned here, and the weakness of this young divinity is contrasted with the perpetual power and fertility of female gods and women. It is also women who are most involved in rituals of death and regeneration. These women are mourning with/for Aphrodite, grieving the loss of her lover. As in Sappho 1 the singer or singers (the sense of community strong in fr. 140a) turn to this god for guidance, and her answer, since once again she replies directly within the hymnal form, reminds them that some natural occurrences are inevitable and that pain can only be alleviated by ritual and song.

This remnant of a cult song is one of the representations that support the proposition that the Sapphic community had a religious focus, that it was devoted to the worship of Aphrodite. Songs that comment self-consciously on song, ritual instructions that were originally part of a ritual, are typical Sapphic occurrences. We are once again witnesses to an incident that is poetically articulated, and centres on a ritual enacted entirely by female personae. The uncomplicated but unusual cult form it takes resounds with the oral rhythms and social dynamics of an earlier age. The cultic activity depicted in fr. 140a appears to continue to find expression in Greek women's lives, but it seems possible that some of Sappho's songs, to Aphrodite, or on topics such as virginity and marriage, also incorporated traces from an earlier 'woman's culture' (Friedrich 1978: 110). So that rather than mimicking or subverting male forms Sappho simply repeated these female themes poetically, fitting them into a corpus of songs that centred on the dreams and experiences, the rites and symbols, of women.

Chapter 2

Songs of love

The songs that Sappho sings most often and with greatest intensity focus on the subject of love. They tell of the love of the singer for her family, of love between brides and grooms, or the women of Sappho's community, or desire for one particular member of the group. In the songs representing these passionate or tender relationships Aphrodite frequently plays a part, assisting or interceding between characters. As a result, the diverse characteristics that attend this god, which Friedrich (1978: 1) feels are combined into 'a meaning that interconnects female sexuality, tenderness, procreation, subjectivity, and other complexes of symbols', are projected on to these songs and the relationships they represent and/or construct. There is one form of love, however, that is most frequently associated with both Aphrodite and Sappho: erotic, or more specifically, homoerotic, desire.[1] Male and female lyric poets are united in Campbell's (1983: 26–7) statement on this theme, the comment that love in the context of Greek lyric poetry 'is sexual, usually, homosexual desire, a temporary admixture of admiration and lust caused by Eros or his mother Aphrodite'. Admiration and lust appear to be oppositional to other more traditionally 'feminine' qualities such as the 'tenderness' and 'subjectivity' that Friedrich gives prominence to in his commentary, but love is one of the few subjects that intrigued both the male and female lyric poets of ancient Greece. Some similarity is also ensured by the fact that the generic constructions used to display these erotic re-creations are derived from a common store. Since the love/desire represented in antiquity is itself disturbing and disordering, the language of these female/male representations could be expected to be equally destabilising. It is also likely to be 'fluid, decentred, multiple', so that 'every discourse of desire

Sappho's Sweetbitter Songs

Configurations of female and male in ancient Greek Lyric

Lyn Hatherly Wilson

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