Kirkwood (1974: 128) considers that 'nature's role is secondary, its portrayal slight' in Sapphic songs, but the sensuality of Sappho's responses to natural phenomena, and her collusion of natural and cultural constructs such as flowers and ritual, effect an amalgamation of dichotomous pairs. In the terms of the domain Sappho represents, dawn is sandalled; stars and moon group and gleam like a bride among her bridesmaids; the earth is embroidered, or garlanded. Trees shake like, foliage is moist or bedewed like, winds breathe like, birds sing and quiver like, water babbles like, fruit and flowers *are* like, beautiful women. Her syncretism is not only poetically effective and as diffusive as moonlight or some later descriptions of woman-made linguistic constructs,[15] it also multiplies the attractiveness of each integrated article or protagonist. When the sexuality of women is featured, the landscape she describes reflects this state. When they love or are beloved their beauty shines all the brighter. Without greatly exceeding the constraints of the lyric genre Sappho was not only selective, she also contrived to idealise, or at least embellish, every 'natural' and/or 'cultural' detail. And despite her passionate poetic avowals and the repeated use of images that befit a conventional twentieth-century scheme of 'feminine' characteristics, her creations are no more uncivilised or 'disorderly'[16] than those of the male poets of ancient Greece. However, the gaze of a woman and her responses to the scenes she beholds, as well as the reciprocal reactions of those who catch and return that gaze, are, at least in this instance, distinctive.

Chapter 6

Circles of women

Desire and sexual experience in Sappho's representations and/or circle[1] are unique, predominantly female experiences that exceed 'malestream', late twentieth-century western conceptions of erotic relationships. The woman-to-woman relationships represented in Sappho's songs still appear, however, to revolve around two participants – lover and beloved – the essential duo that replicates binary patterns of thought and language. In this chapter I investigate the possibility that the erotic emotion expressed within Sappho's songs/circle had pluralistic dimensions, that at times it involved several singer/dancers[2] who constructed a physical circle as they participated in the interactions of a 'delightful choir' ('πολυγ]άθην χόρον' fr. 70). The dramatically explicated scenes examined in the love songs reveal a consistently plural, if not extraordinary number of protagonists: Sappho 1 includes Aphrodite, the poet/singer/lover, and her beloved; fr. 16 focuses first on Helen and then on the singer's love for Anaktoria; in fr. 22 the singer urges one woman, Abanthis, to sing of her love for another, Gongyla; and we are faced with a more angst-ridden, but still triangular scenario in fr. 31. Within each of these scenes it is possible to extract and relate to a pair of lovers, and to equate these constructions with ideas about the 'natural' structures of relationships. But interactions reported by some songs (i.e. frr. 2, Sappho or Alcaeus 16, 17, 22, 27, 30, 70, 94, 96, 140a, 160) suggest that these women functioned as a collective unit, singing, dancing and worshipping together.[3] The collectivity of the members of this community, their erotic and other exchanges and their dialogue/s, as represented in Sappho's songs, seem in some ways to anticipate the future conditional state proposed by Irigaray. She 'conceives of the subject-in-process (to borrow a useful term from

Kristeva) as a subject in dialogue, engaged with the other'.[4] Whitford's (1991: 48) reading of Irigaray's work tells us that 'the conditions of emergence of female subjectivity are simultaneously, then, love between women (a female homosexual economy) which is the matrix which can generate change, and language or discourse as a process of enunciation, a dynamic exchange between interlocutors which can transfigure flesh and blood.'

Assuming that archaic contexts as disparate as Lesbos and Sparta can be paralleled – and I agree with Parker[5] that this assumption is problematic – some passages in Sappho's songs resemble the form of collective desire ascribed by Calame to Spartan female lyric contexts. One similarity is the first person pronoun that is often considered synonymous with the lyric voice and its traditional I/you formulations. Despite its usual personal, confessional, attribution, in archaic contexts such as these, this pronoun is quite possibly impersonal and not necessarily singular at all.[6] Once the autobiographical inferences that shadow lyric voices – particularly female ones – are detached, they become much less personal. Sappho's songs are often divided into two discrete categories: the epithalamia, some of which are considered to be choral; and her private, monodic songs of love and/or prayer. This binary-type division seems to have been initiated long after Sappho's songs were composed, and, in the context of archaic poetry, to be relatively arbitrary, since, as Kirkwood (1974: 10) assures us: 'nowhere in the ancient classifications is the distinction made between choral and monodic'. Questions about private/public poetic contexts or the single/multiple voices sounding behind these productions cannot be concluded easily or securely. For instance, the fragments of folk song that occasionally echo through Sappho's poetry appear to be both public and private, communal and erotic, and to present a traditional form of the I/us voice.

Fr. 102 is a song that tells, in an uncomplicated fashion, of the debilitating effect that love for a boy has had upon the singer.

γλύκηα μᾶτερ, οὔτοι δύναμαι κρέκην τὸν ἴστον
πόθῳ δάμεισα παῖδος βραδίναν δι' Ἀφροδίταν.

Sweet mother, I cannot weave my web,
desire for a boy has overcome me
because of slender Aphrodite.

Aphrodite is to blame for the singer's temporary disability, and the adjective 'βραδίναν', and the word used to describe the effect of her influence, 'δάμεισα' are words that recur in Sapphic contexts (frr. 1.3, 44b.7 and 115.2). Sweetly 'heterosexual' and 'feminine' as it appears, the song is said to have originated not from the fertile territory of Sappho's imagination, but 'ultimately from popular tradition' and Bowra (1961: 134) categorises it as 'a *chanson de toile*, such as girls sang over the loom, lamenting their loves'. Once again, within Sappho's songs, appears a fragment which apparently lingers from folk song, perhaps from a female tradition, and tells of the sorrows or loves of women via multiple voices. It presents a more impersonal and conventional statement of love than other Sapphic lyrics, one which slips uncontentiously into a framework of male poetry and/or morals. However, male poets tend not to compose songs about a young woman weaving a web who is overcome with a surprisingly gentle form of debilitation or spell-casting by a female god. Nor do they re-produce interactions between girls and mothers. The subduing of Sappho's young singer/weaver appears as a good-natured exchange between child and mother, or a young woman and a female god, that offers an excuse for a welcome escape from weaving, in addition to beginning the movement from childhood to the experience of eroticism.

Communal rituals which mark the transition from childhood to adult status feature often in Calame's discussion.[7] Some Sapphic songs could represent this form of festivity although their unworldliness and sophistication tend to distinguish them from the tribal rites Calame analyses. The original purpose of the eucharistic festival featured in Sappho 2 is obscure, but it is possible that it was a celebration marking the transition of some adolescent members of the circle from pre- to mature sexuality. In the final section of Sappho 2, Aphrodite appears and mingles nectar with festivities, and mortal with immortal protagonists: perhaps she is here to officiate, to celebrate the advent of erotic maturity with a group of initiates. The background voice, the singer who re-creates and mingles divinity, garden and festivities, seems to be singular, though as she is unnamed and relatively peripheral to the action of the song, it is impossible to be certain. The personal pronoun could be lyrically plural, this could be a choral event, with the group of initiates, or their more mature companions, begging Aphrodite to glorify this special occasion with her presence. A number of human protagonists appear to

be involved, perhaps they were the singers, and Sappho – the poet whose distinctive style permeates every repeated echo of her songs – directed a choir of young women.[8] A smaller fragment, one most frequently ascribed to Sappho since the authorship is clearly Lesbian (Sappho or Alcaeus 16), draws an attractive picture of women dancing around an altar, 'treading softly on delicate flowers of grass' ('πόας τέρεν ἄνθος μάλακον μάτεισαι').

The debate about whether this community was in some way/s an institution dedicated to worship of the gods – perhaps predominantly Aphrodite – continues to flourish, fuelled by the lack of socio-historical evidence and a plurality of theses. Despite their erotic undertones, fragments such as Sappho 1, 2, 154 and S. or A. 16, encourage such hypotheses, and this religious/institutional denomination is supported by Calame's analysis.[9] There are other fragments that do appear to support this thesis and promote the idea that these women were united in some way/s, in this case as worshippers and ritual celebrants. For example, fr. 150 rather summarily announces 'that there should be no lamentation in the house of those who serve the Muses' ('οὐ γὰρ θέμις ἐν μοισοπόλων † οἰκίᾳ † θρῆνον ἔμμεν'). Gentili (1988: 84) suggests that words like 'μοισοπόλων' have 'precise religious meaning'. Other references to altars and shrines, or voices raised in holy song, occur frequently enough to imply that there was a religious focus. In a minor dialogue (fr. 140a), the women of this establishment are instructed to participate in an empathetic, ritualistic and communal episode of mourning for Aphrodite's consort, Adonis. It seems that it is not only desire that these young women experience in common with this god and each other, lamentation (at least for a divine figure) is also shared. The authoritative tone behind these and other similar pronouncements ('κ]έλομαι σ'' 'I urge/command you' fr. 22.9, or 'μέλπεσθ' ἄγι ταῦτα' 'come and sing this' fr. 27.2, or 'σὺ δὲ στεφάνοις, ὦ Δίκα, πέρεσθ' ἐράτοις φόβαισιν' 'and you, Dika, twine lovely garlands around your curls' fr. 81.4) encourages the listener to separate the implied duality of singer/audience or leader/choir into the teacher/pupil relationship which is one of the most popular modern images of Sappho's community. Since the nineteenth century, European commentators have constructed and applied this educational model to Sappho's community, in what Parker (1993: 313) believes is an attempt 'to explain away Sappho's passion for her "girls", allowing her the emotion of love but denying it any

physical component, by recasting it in the form of an explicitly "Platonic" and propaedeutic love'. Since the concept of 'Sappho Schoolmistress' is implicated in the ideals/morals of later western culture, and, as Parker (1993: 322) states, reflects models 'of controlling male to controlled Other, and reveals a disturbing obsession with power and hierarchy', it appears to have very little relation to the world of Sappho and the female companions ('ἑταίραις' fr. 160) to whom she sang beautifully.

Whatever the purpose or orientation of the Sapphic community, the co-ordination of its members into some form of collective association that sang, prayed, celebrated, grieved and perhaps loved together, seems indisputable. Interactions of all kinds, from discussions of dress, music and correct behaviour to expressions of group solidarity and/or exclusion (frr. 150, 140a and 55) abound in these songs. The element that binds the circle together and distinguishes it from similar socio-poetic groups, seems to be the emphasis on love and the beauty that inspires love. Burnett (1983: 209) suggests that Sappho's community was not unlike Alcaeus' male association – that both groups were 'aristocratic, musical, and constrained only by bonds of love and loyalty'. Calame also draws parallels, linguistically and institutionally, between the lyric choirs represented by Alcman and Sappho. Despite the close bonds constraining his group of aristocrats, and the poetic re-creation of festivities such as Damoanactidas' entrance into the world of adult sexuality in fr. 296b, it has not been suggested that desire in the Alcaean community was pluralistic. Was this the case in either Sappho's community or the virginal choirs Alcman reconstructed in his lyric songs?

Desire and/or beauty in the context of Alcman's partheneia is represented as being debilitating – limb-loosening,[10] more melting than sleep or death (Alcman 3.61–2) – and competitive. This 'agonistic' atmosphere appears to arise less from the decorative compliments paid to women by other women,[11] than from the equine-centred imagery accompanying those remarks (Alcman 1.39–49). This imagery directly associates horses with women, then places these women/horses in a hierarchical scheme of faster and slower, sturdy and more glorious. The scheme identifies and highlights two women whose names proclaim them leaders – Agido and Hagesichora – and reduces the rest of the choir to a grazing herd or a team of working horses. The choice of imagery/comparison provokes awareness of the male poet behind this

representation.[12] Anacreon also makes use of equine imagery, calling a girl whom the singer would like to master, with all the 'masculine' skill at his disposal, a 'Thracian filly' ('πῶλε Θρηκίη' Anacreon 417.1). In both cases the comparisons are intended to be complimentary, but the differences between this male analogy and Sappho's equitable, more woman-centred comparisons are telling. With its risqué imagery, the connotations of dominance and submission that are securely bound up in this image, and the projection of some of the symbols of a male world on to female subjects, such parallelism appears male-centred.

Behind the imagery in Alcman 1, however, the song seems to have separated its all-female protagonists into two groups, one pair of leaders who are praised extravagantly by a number of companions or cousins ('ἀνεψιάσ') who make up the chorus. The chorus are represented as singing – presumably in unison using the lyric 'I/us' – of the beauty and power of their leaders and at times this power seems to be erotic. Certainly the remarks represented in Alcman 1.74–7 give this impression. The wishes expressed: 'if only Astaphis were mine, if only Philylla were to look my way and Damareta and lovely Ianthemis' ('Ασταφίς [τ]έ μοι γένοιτο καὶ ποτιγλέποι Φίλυλλα, Δαμαρ[έ]τα τ' ἐρατά τε Ϝανθεμίς') introduce a note of desire into these all-female and collective proceedings. There is some dissension about the wording of the following line (Alcman 1.77), so we are presented with two possible meanings: it could mean either 'but Hagesichora guards me' ('τηρεῖ'), or 'but Hagesichora wears me out (with love)' ('τείρει').[13] Either or both versions suggest that some erotic affiliation exists between the two leaders of the chorus, or between leaders and choreutes, and/or between members of the chorus. This atmosphere of rivalry, of 'longing to love most of all' ('ἐγὼ[ν] δὲ τᾶι μὲν .... μάλιστα Ϝαδάνην ἐρῶ' Alcman 1.87–8) other women and female divinities, ends – a little like Sappho 31 – on a note of acceptance or peace, before it resumes its complimentary interchanges, this time with references to trace-horses, ships, helmsmen and Sirens. The fragment trails off at a moment of unity, when this choir of ten are represented as singing together a 'song that is like that of a swan on the waters of the Xanthus' ('παίδων δεκ[ὰς ἅδ' ἀειδ]ει· φθέγγεται δ' [ἄρ'] ὥ[τ' ἐπὶ] Ξάνθω ῥοαῖσι κύκνος·' Alcman 1.99–100).

Alcman 3 begins with eager talk of an assembly ('ἀγών') and ritual movements before it breaks for fifty verses then moves on

to 'with limb-loosening desire, and she looks (at me?) more meltingly than sleep or death' ('λυσιμελεῖ τε πόσωι, τακερώτερα δ' ὕπνω καὶ σανάτω ποτιδέρκεται' Alcman 3.61–2). It does nothing to dispel this suggestion of collective homoerotic desire. The initial invocation could have been presented by the poet or a solo singer, but the second part of the fragment once again features complimentary exchanges between women, reports of outstanding beauty and popularity as well as the representation of desire 'ἴδομ' αἴ πως με ... ον φιλοῖ' (Alcman 3.79). The conditional sequence contained in the last section of reasonably comprehensible text: 'ἄσ]σον [ἰο]ῖσ' ἁπαλᾶς χηρὸς λάβοι, αἴψά κ'[ἐγὼν ἱ]κέτις κήνας γενοίμαν' (Alcman 3.80–1) continues this mood of longing and adds the touch of a soft hand. What was the original purpose or import of these exchanges? Was the representation of female-to-female desire and rivalry a conventional feature of archaic lyric? Or was there a time when women sang and loved communally in circles or choirs? The association depicted in Alcman's partheneia, some of the erotic passages included in his songs, as well as the descriptions of female beauty and superiority, seem analogous to Sappho's representations of homoerotic desire.[14]

The situation represented in Sappho 22, when the singer urges Abanthis to take her lyre and sing of Gongyla, could be construed as a representation of erotic communal interaction. This could be a singer or leader giving instructions to members of a choir of girls about correct exchanges (musical and/or erotic) and the manner in which the desire associated with the 'ἄγνα Κ]υπρογέν]ηα' (22.15–16) should be expressed and/or celebrated. The ritualistic nature of this plural form of erotic desire and interaction seems at odds with singular forms such as: 'κ]έλομαι' (22.9) and 'β]όλλομα[ι' (22.19). Was it in fact not I, but we, who 'wish', a chorus who apply together to Aphrodite – perhaps for intercession in one of the moments of desire that recur in Sappho's lyrics – moments that seem not dissimilar to the representation in Alcman 3.79–80? Sappho 23 continues in the same vein, one woman gazes at another, praises her extravagantly, likening her to semi-divinities such as Helen and her daughter Hermione who possess more than mortal beauty, then apparently (the text here is regretfully lacunose) suggests that if her love was returned it would release her from all her cares 'παίσαν κέ με τὰν μερίμναν' (23.8).[15] Some members of the Sapphic community seem to look forward to going/singing together at weddings (frr. 27 and 30),

rather than assemblies, but perhaps the spirit of communal interaction and semi-public choral presentation is not all that different from the interaction represented in Alcman 3. Even fragments such as Sappho 31, with its expressions of longing for another woman and erotic debilitation, could be drawn into a list of songs representing communal interaction. Although a comparison between Alcman's conventional erotic tropes: 'limb-loosening desire' and looks more melting 'than sleep or death'[16] and the desolation of the singer/lover of fr. 31 tends to foreground the differences between these songs and/or poets.

The competitive spirit evident in Alcman's partheneia stems, not just internally from relations within the chorus, but from external exchanges such as the representation of a contest between choruses – presumably for prizes and glory. Within the Sapphic community an internal/external split is also evident, but its parameters and modes are more complex. Toward her friends, 'ταὶς κάλαισ' ὔμμιν' (fr. 41) Sappho's thoughts might be unchangeable, but to women outside the circle some representations suggest a more antipathetic attitude. Fr. 55 provides an example of this form of hostility. Associations such as Sappho's are defined as much by what lies beyond the circle as what exists within. Other fragments express a more personal view, and are directed at women who have left, or are considering leaving, Sappho's community. Mika, who is mentioned in fr. 71, is reviled as a 'κα[κό]τροπ" for her choice of new companions.

Within the Sapphic community there is also some good-natured rivalry – apparently of an erotic nature – between its members as they engage, disengage and re-engage in romantic alliances that are in some ways reminiscent of the interplay represented in Alcman's partheneia. There is also another external component, one which appears to some extent to anneal the split between inner/outer protagonists. Some of the women now outside Sappho's circle, but still emotionally attached to some of its members, seem to have left amicably if unwillingly, perhaps to rejoin their families or to marry. These separations signify an end to life in the circle, and some of the most detailed and emotional reports of communal erotic interaction are included in dialogues that represent the sorrow of those members still within this ambience of close friendship who love others now situated outside the circle. Carson's (1986: 10) definition of eros as lack or desire for what is missing relates to a dilemma that is clearly a painful

and poetically dynamic aspect of relations between these physically/socially separate lovers. Perhaps lamentation was not encouraged within a house dedicated to the Muses (fr. 150), but songs such as Sappho 96 are full of sorrow. The sense of community and choral/erotic interplay is strong in a song that represents the interaction between two women, one of whom took most delight (96.5) in the other's song.

There is another song dealing with this theme, a woman who is represented as being distraught at the thought of leaving the circle. The song centres on a list of communal activities which is richly embroidered by the Sappho-singer, apparently to console this lover. Fr. 94 has often been called 'The Confession', a label which carries a weight of possibly misleading assumptions, of singular, personal utterance, or of the iteration of some wrong-doing. The song takes the form of a dialogue, between the Sappho-singer[17] and the woman who is leaving, but the sense of community, and of an internal/external split that is, to some extent, healed by song, love and memory, reverberates through every line. Unfortunately the text is fragmentary,[18] with lacunae which can only increase its mysterious, tantalising ambivalence.

τεθνάκην δ' ἀδόλως θέλω·
ἄ με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν

πόλλα καὶ τόδ' ἔειπέ [μοι·
'ὤιμ' ὡς δεῖνα πεπ[όνθ]αμεν,
Ψάπφ', ἦ μάν σ' ἀέκοισ' ἀπυλιμπάνω.'

τὰν δ' ἔγω τάδ' ἀμειβόμαν·
'χαίροισ' ἔρχεο κἄμεθεν
μέμναισ', οἶσθα γὰρ ὤς σε πεδήπομεν·

αἰ δὲ μή, ἀλλά σ' ἔγω θέλω
ὄμναισαι [. . . .] . [. . .] . . αι
. .[ ]καὶ κάλ' ἐπάσχομεν.

πό[λλοις γὰρ στεφάν]οις ἴων
καὶ βρ[όδων κρο]κίων τ' ὔμοι
κα. .[ ] πὰρ ἔμοι περεθήκαο,

καὶ πό[λλαις ὐπα]θύμιδας
πλέκ[ταις ἀμφ' ἀ]πάλαι δέραι
ἀνθέων ἔ[βαλες] πεποημμέναις,

καὶ πολλωι [ ] . μύρωι
βρενθείωι . [ ]ρν[. .]ν
ἐξαλείψαο κα[ὶ βασ]ιληίωι,

καὶ στρώμν[αν ἐ]πὶ μολθάκαν
ἀπάλαν πα . [ ] . . . ων
ἐξίης πόθο[ν] . νίδων,

κωὔτε τις[οὔ]τε τι
ἶρον οὐδυ[ ]
ἔπλετ' ὄππ[οθεν ἄμ]μες ἀπέσκομεν

οὐκ ἄλσος .[χ]όρος
]ψόφος
] . . . οιδιαι

Honestly, I wish I were dead!
Weeping, she was leaving me

with so many tears, and she said to me:
'what awful fate has befallen us
Sappho, I leave you against my will.'

This is the answer I gave her:
'go, and fare well, and remember
for you know how we cherished you.

If you have forgotten, then I want
to remind you [. . . .] [. . . .]
. . [. .] and the good times we had.

Many wreaths of violets,
roses and [crocuses] you put on
. . [. . . .] together, by my side,

and many woven garlands
made from flowers
you placed [round] your soft neck

and with much [. . . .] perfume
rich and flowery [ ]
fit for a [queen], you anointed. . . .

and on soft beds
tender [. . . .]
you satisfied desire.

There was neither [. . . .]
nor shrine [. . . .]
from which we were absent

no grove [. . . .] nor dance
. . . .] no sound . . . .

It begins on the second line of one of its three-line stanzas with a passionate statement which might be serious and could therefore initiate a sorrowful sequence, if there were not two voices in this song, one of which calmly enumerates the pleasures of previously shared love. Pleasures that are to be remembered, slipped through the mind like 'rosary' beads, or a catechism to be repeated in lonely moments. The tranquil tone assumed by the Sappho-singer clashes with the despair of the Sappho-lover who speaks first, highlighting the playful exaggeration which is a possible interpretation of 'ἀδόλως'[19] and changing the tenor of the entire fragment. Rather than dispassionately discussing the miseries which must befall all mortals (as in Mimnermus 1), this song seems to be designed to give comfort in a way which would be almost maternal if it did not linger over erotic details. The intimacy, the choice of form (a dialogue between lovers) and imagery, and the sensuous descriptions give the impression of a distinctive and female-oriented world. The singer in Mimnermus 1 contents himself with alluding to a temporary sequence of pleasures which gently reproduce the adversary relationships depicted by other male poets: desire, a chase, then surrender and secret embraces. Placed beside Sappho's fulsome descriptions of pleasure (which extend over seven of the remaining ten stanzas), they appear meagre, insufficient to console the singer or his audience against the despondency which he communicates at length. Filling these stanzas with luxurious descriptions representing past, present and future experience, Sappho delineates pleasures which collude to create a continuum of love, one which is seductively attractive, comparatively timeless, and is shared by the women who make up the circle.

These persuasive descriptions are multi-dimensional, with imagistic, ritualistic and symbolic significance and have a consistently 'flowery' aspect that appears to be conventionally erotic. The list in which they are incorporated – which is full of reminders of 'the good times we had' (94.11) – has links with other socio-religious festivals (Sappho frr. 2, 154, Alcaeus 296b and Sappho or Alcaeus 16) celebrated by a group of participants. As the song

progresses, it moves from the intimacy of two protagonists to include all sexually mature members of the circle. The final section of another cohesive, if paratactic list, in which three stanzas begin with and are joined by 'καὶ', tells of desire that is satisfied on soft beds (94.23) and unlike Homer who uses 'ἐξίημι' in the middle voice, in Sappho 94 it is active, suggesting that it was someone else's desire which was satisfied. In spite of the switch to a single speaker the I/you mode is still apparent here ('ἐξίης' 94.23), but apart from the equivocal status of the lyric 'I', other factors suggest a more plural interpretation. Sappho's tendency to integrate past, present and future in a single moment or song is no doubt effective as a consolatory measure, but within the circle it must also integrate the various protagonists who have experienced these erotic pleasures and participated in amorous exchanges at different times. The final broken fragments hint at other socio-communal activities such as singing and dancing at shrines and groves (94.24–7) and seem again to include all members of the circle.

One important role of archaic poets – the transmission of essential information (Havelock 1986: 68–9) in oral environments – suggests some exchange of knowledge, as well as love, between the women of this community. The authoritative tone of the Sappho-singer's voice confirms this orientation. If these representations were originally created not just as love songs but as a means of initiating women, through the mediums of song and ritual, into correct modes of behaviour, then the songs appear quite different. Sappho 1, for example, represents an example of contractual obligations: if you refuse love, you wrong not only Sappho but Aphrodite, and you could be forced to comply with a code that stipulates the desirability and necessity of engaging in erotic relationships. Women like Abanthis (fr. 22) are urged to show their love for another woman. Helen in fr. 16, the Sappho-singer in 31 and other songs, appear as paradigms, as outstanding erotic figures. And the festivals described so richly, invitingly, illustrate pleasures available to the members of this circle. This represented world is idealistic, intimate and full of love and the spirit of community interaction. It was, at least within the songs that represent it, also less competitive than the world of Alcman's partheneia. Stigers (1981: 54) defines the pattern of love she traces in Sappho's poetry: 'of mutuality rather than domination and subjection, of intimacy based on comprehending the other out of the self . . . the ideal characteristic of lesbian love'.

Chapter 7

A chain of remembrance

Many of the descriptions of desire and erotic interaction in Sappho's songs are mediated – transformed and perpetuated – by the way she represents memory. In male lyric poetry, time was represented as a relentless enemy, love was temporary, exhilarating, and often violent.[1] For Sappho the manipulation of time through memory extended sweetbitter moments of love into a poetic eternity. In this chapter I investigate this mediating force and the effect it has on many of her representations. Not only those concerned with erotic exchanges, but also the time-oriented divisions in a woman's life, and the myths and rituals that Sappho reconstructs, that construct modes of poetic and communal interaction which defy temporal categories. In the context of love memory is consolatory, renewing, idealising; it also has the power to negate the pain of present anguish or separation or time-ridden distinctions such as old age. As a primary constituent of oral poetry it is represented by a divinity, Mnemosyne.[2] Association with Mnemosyne, and with the power that attends her, glorifies both song and singer.

Distinctions can be mapped between oral and literate memories, mechanisms, skills, and the value which either oral or literate cultures attach to memory. One distinctive aspect is a question of time. Vernant (1983: 89) considers that epic/oral time is cyclical and cosmological, but when, as a lyric poet

> the individual turns to consider his own emotional life, and, in the thrall of the present moment with all that accompanies it in the way of pleasure and pain, he locates the values to which he has become attached in time as it passes, he feels that he himself is being swept along in a moving, ever-changing, and irreversible flux.

Sappho's Sweetbitter Songs

Configurations of female and male in ancient Greek Lyric

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London and New York