

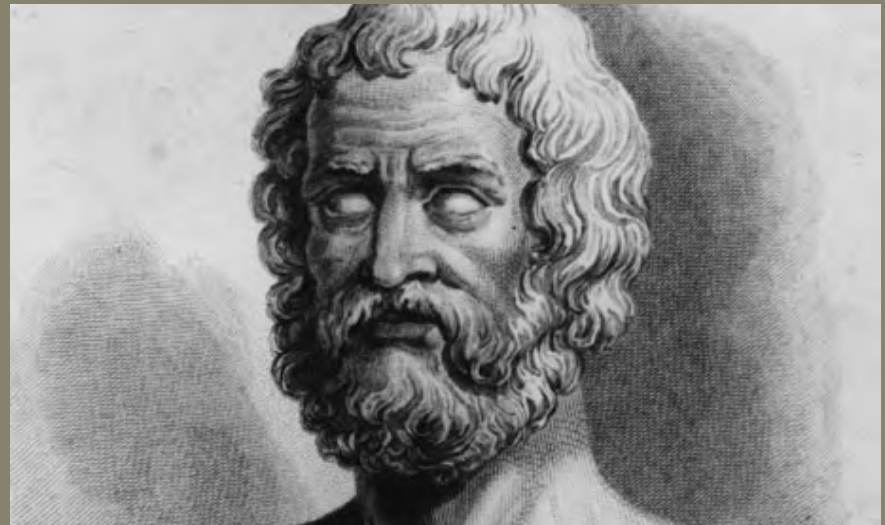
May the Muse be With You



Nine (count them) naked goddesses of creativity, with their own props (the dagger for tragedy, the spinning globe for sci-fi) putting ideas in a writer's head!



This is how it started; they dictated the first page in the first book to the first writer; and, guess what, it was about them.



<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm>

Where Hesiod got his ideas
from...

And one day they taught Hesiod
glorious song while he was
shepherding his lambs under holy
Helicon, and this word first the
goddesses said to me -- the Muses of
Olympus, daughters of Zeus who
holds the aegis:

(Il. 26-28) 'Shepherds of the
wilderness, wretched things of shame,
mere bellies, we know how to speak
many false things as though they were
true; but we know, when we will, to
utter true things.'



The Muses sing the story and they're in the story; the creation myth is autobiographical.



(Il. 29-35) So said the
ready-voiced
daughters of great
Zeus, and they
plucked and gave me a
rod, a shoot of sturdy
laurel, a marvellous
thing, and breathed
into me a divine voice
to celebrate things that
shall be and things
there were aforetime;
and they bade me sing
of the race of the
blessed gods that are
eternally, but ever to
sing of themselves both
first and last.

And here's Homer
with the Muse;
whatever it is they're doing
has been superimposed
on the original mosaic.
I think it could be scrolls,
representing the written story;
though this poet,
if he was an actual person,
was said to be blind and was
certainly illiterate.

<http://www.online-literature.com/homer/odyssey/>

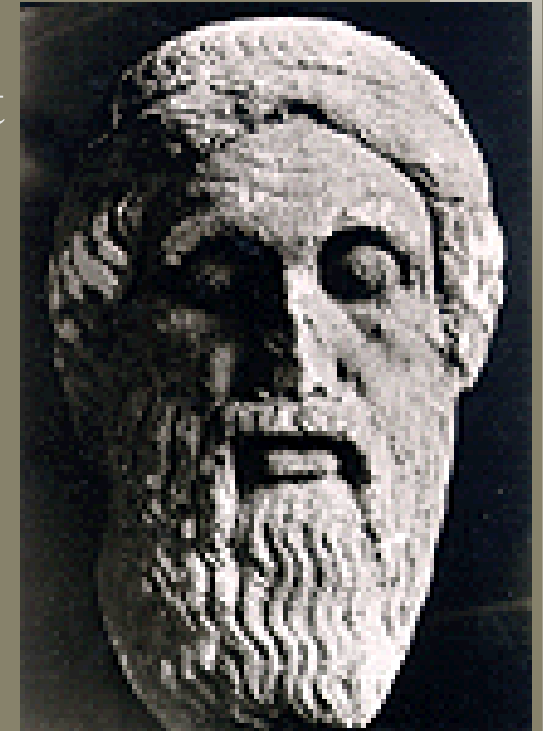




This is how they thought divine inspiration worked: Homer, bottom left, is being admired by the human audience at ground level; while up above, nine singing goddess are dictating his verses from a higher realm.

‘Let us begin, goddess of song,’ he says at the opening of the *Iliad*, acknowledging that he wasn’t going to narrate this epic tale single-handedly (1966, p.1).

‘Sing in me Muse, and through me tell the story,’ he says in the first lines of the *Odyssey*. ‘Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus, tell us in our time; lift the great song again.’ (1965, p.1) No claim for originality, no promise it was all his own work; Homer admits to plagiarism of ideas from a divine source.



Blind, but visionary!

Homer. (1965). *The Odyssey*. New York: Harper & Row.

Homer. (1966). *The Iliad*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.

At first, Homer only mentions one Muse (Daughter of Zeus) but later writers mention three. Melete (practice), Mneme (memory), Aoede (song):



How the arts started, remembering and practising songs.



Then came the three time three; and Apollo was put in charge.
It looks like quite a party, though the period costumes are all over the place.

Apollo sobered the high priestesses up; and from then on poets only wore the laurel wreaths without imbibing the leaves...





Apollo, naked again and now with a halo. (Of all the Greek Gods he is the most Christ-like). He and his more debauched brother Dionysus are said to preside over the creative writing process (see Nietzsche 'The Birth of Tragedy' for further details...)

The 'Hippocrene Spring'
was named for the
winged horse Pegasus,
who was so pleased
to see the
Muses on the Helicon
mountainside that he struck
the rock with his hoof,
making the horseshoe-shaped
spring, from which the magical
waters started to flow!





Hesiod tells how, born of Zeus and the Titan Mnemosyne in a marriage that lasted nine days, the Muses discovered letters and invented language. They were portrayed in art, on walls and floors, as beautiful virgins; on vases and jars, adorned with wreaths of palm leaves, laurel, roses (and feathers that they won from the Sirens in a singing competition). Their mother, Mnemosyne, was goddess of memory and time, who represented the oral tradition, of tales preserved by word of mouth before there was writing.

See how their attributes are added to the picture later; the muses were made cheerleaders for literacy long after their first appearance in the oral tradition.



A Roman mosaic of the nine muses.



Hesiod says 'They are all of one voice', but here they seem to be all of one face, too



Calliope is the eldest and most distinguished of the Muses, identified with philosophy and epic poetry.



Her emblems are stylus and wax tablets. Her name means 'Beautiful Voice'.

Clío



Credited with introducing the Phoenician alphabet into Greece, her attribute is usually a parchment scroll. Her name means 'The Proclaimer'.





Erato

Erato is the Muse of lyric poetry, of love and erotic poetry, of the romantic novel. For the ancient Greeks, she was also Goddess of mimicry; so perhaps even divinities sometimes fake their pleasure.





Euterpe

Euterpe is
'The Giver of Pleasure';
the one who offers music itself.
She is pictured playing
a double flute,
her own invention.



Melpomene is the Muse of tragedy. 'The Songstress' wears a tragic mask and *cothurnus*, the heavy boots of Greek tragedy actors.



Thalia rules over comedy and pastoral, merry and idyllic poetry. She favours country pursuits and is traditionally pictured holding a comic mask and a shepherd's staff.



Thalia



Polyhymnia is goddess
of the sublime and sacred hymn.
She is shown in a pensive pose
without any props.
Her name means
'Many Songs of Praise'.



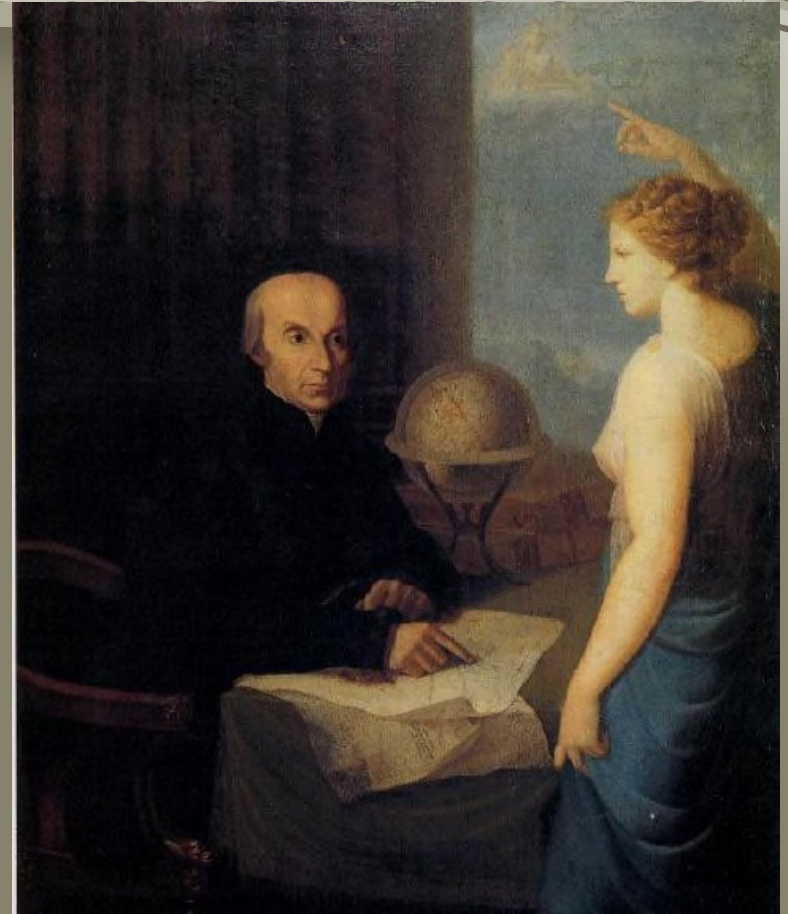


Terpsichore

Terpsichore is the Muse of dance. Surprisingly she is often shown seated, but her links with education imply she is a dance teacher rather than a performer.



The Muse of Astronomy and Astrology



Urania

There have been many claims made for a 'tenth Muse'. In the University of Portsmouth library alone, three different books have this title, citing three different cultural practices worthy of a spiritual mentor. Opera libretto (Smith, 1971), literary criticism (Read, 1957) and the peculiar psyche of the American poet (Gelpi, 1991) all make their bids for a Muse to call their own.

The Common Muse (De Sola Pinto & Rodway, 1965), *The Thinking Muse* (Allen & Young, 1989), *The Violent Muse* (Howlett & Mengham, 1994), *The Tragic Muse* (James, 1995), *The Industrial Muse* (Vicinus, 1974), *The Unembarrassed Muse* (Nye, 1970) and even *The Subsidized Muse* (Netzer, 1978) are further examples of works that use the Muse as a sort of shorthand for creativity in the face of social conditions.

A festival of in-text referencing, APA style
(in case you want to know) . Please do cite
anything you take from my site!

Great guidance for this at:

<http://referencing.port.ac.uk/>



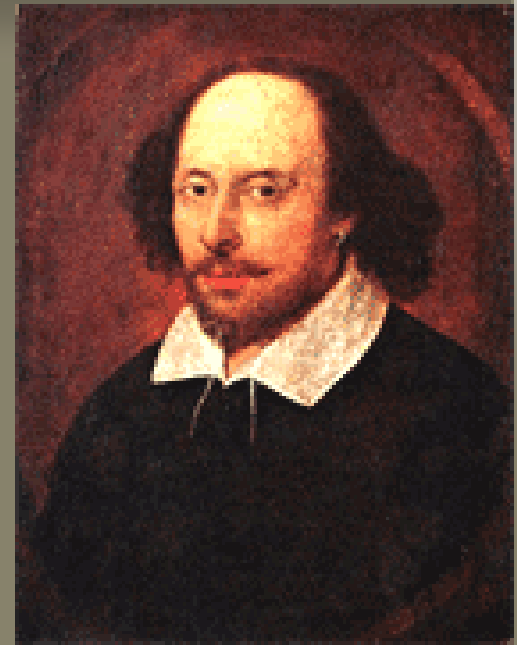
Sappho was the first female poet to be called the tenth muse. She was born in Lesbos in BC 615



As Calliope,
Clio and co.
stagger off along
the literary timeline,
its still not clear
where they stand on
the line between
fact and fiction.



Where the pen and the sword are both mighty reminders of the penis, the muse's appearance on the literary timeline is disappointing. In Shakespeare's sonnets, she is often mentioned, but always because of an unsatisfying performance. Here are two examples in which she is 'tongue-tied' and 'truant':



85:
My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still,
While comments of your praise richly compiled
Reserve their character with golden quill
And precious phrase by all the Muses filed.

101:
O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends
For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed?
Both truth and beauty on my love depends;
So dost thou too, and therein dignified.
Make answer, Muse!



Milton: blind but visionary! Dictating Paradise Lost to his daughter in a scene of muse-reversal!

‘Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring;
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string;
Hence with denial vain and coy excuse:
So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destined urn’

He shows utter trust in the unearthly word, but this in itself can lead to trouble. In *Lycidas*, his elegy for a drowned friend, Milton sets himself up as a channel for the voice of the Muse as usual; ‘So may some gentle Muse/ With lucky words favour my destined urn (Fowler, 1991, p. 420).

But this self-image of the writer as an upturned container to catch stories in, changes when he starts to blame his narrative angels for the tragedy described:

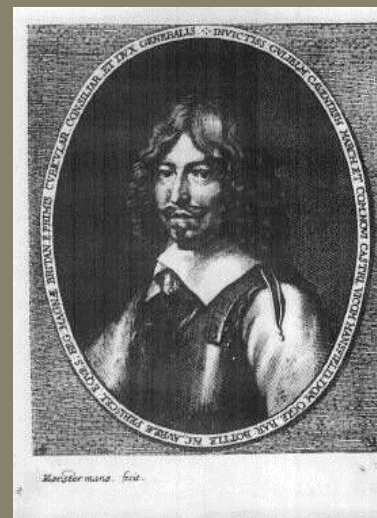


Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?



Margaret Cavendish (1623-73)
mostly wrote about science;
sonnets about the atom and the
optic nerve, which were very
ahead of her time. The one
reference she seems to make to
the muse is this mention in a sarky
ode to her husband;

*A Poet I am neither borne, nor bred,
But to a witty Poet married:
Whose Braine is Fresh, and Pleasant, as the Spring,
Where Fancies grow, and where the Muses sing.
There oft I leane my Head, and list'ning harke,
To heare his words and all his Fancies mark;
And from that Garden Flowers of Fancies take,
Whereof a Posie up in Verse I make.
Thus I, that have no Garden of mine owne,
There gather Flowers that are newly blowne.*



So the Lord said: 'Eat this scroll.'

I did and it was sweet and light and warm

And filled my belly. But I didn't speak

For all His urgings. Tolstoy's good

And Kafka nourishing. I lick

The fat from all the books I can

In the shops at lunchtime – Ovid, Byron, Keats...

The assistants know me, but they let me feast

On spaghetti sentences if I don't break the spines

Of paperbacks and I replace them fast



Even those recent women poets who just talk about men, matrimony and motherhood don't mention the muse much. Other voices from the mountain-tops of myth figure instead, in 'Oxford Booklicker', from Gwyneth Lewis' collection Parables & Faxes. Christianity has ousted the pagan personifications and the bard has replaced the muse priestess.

There's still no proof of divine inspiration. And the timeline of the Muses' influence is neither straight nor linear. Once, an invocation to the muse was proper; then fashion put them in a series of polite disguises, learning to mock or mimic them till, by the modern period, their voices were barely heard.

But though this seems to map a strong connection growing weaker over the centuries, each era has writers who tuned in to that constant creative broadcast, and writers who turned it off.



“Welcome to the Hippocrene spring, home of inspiration, seat of genius. This water is the traditional source of brilliant ideas, artistic masterpieces, virtuoso performances. You don’t have to be a superstar to drink here, though. Art teachers and therapists are filled too with the divine gift of creativity; even the critic may sip from the same cup as the artiste he reviews.

I wish I could say the spring was horseshoe-shaped, as its name implies; but the opening is hidden by a frill of ferns, hushed by the rushes. Seeing water trickling out of rock, liquid out of solid, is getting my creative juices flowing. And as for drinking it, well, I think the Hippocrene spring won’t taste like horse-piss, when it passes my lips.”

From *Translating The Muse’s Tale* by Alison Habens

(My fictional character goes on a day trip to Mount Helicon!)



Does the muse sing the same way to other authors, in different times and places;
and have I (on a minor scale) caught a murmur too?

So there is a circle at the end of the timeline;
and those who dance in it have started to look 'samey'.
If that is the source of writers' ideas, it has become a homogenised spring;
a universal cream, a vanilla art.
But I will get you closer to it if you click on Clio; to find a complex web
of inspirations from the Muses' sister-subjects;
the Sibyls, the Sirens and the Sphinx, timeless spinners of a female tale.



Laureate!