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THE MUSES AND CREATIVE INSPIRATION:
HOMER TO MILTON

by Kathleen Potthoff McHugh

A thesis submitted to the Department of Language and Literature
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Unpublished work c Kathleen Potthoff McHugh

Certificate of Approval Page

The thesis of Kathleen Potthoff McHugh is approved:

Signature deleted

Signature deleted

JUNE 10, 1993

Signature deleted

6-10-93

Committee Chairperson

6-10-93

Accepted for the Department:

Signature deleted

Chairperson

6-11-93

Accepted for the College/School:

Signature deleted

Dean/Director

6/14/93

Accepted for the University:

Signature deleted

Vice President for Academic Affairs

6/14/93

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Maybe this project began when I read the "prooimias" of Theogony on a ship from Italy to Greece, or when I started to fully understand Robert Graves' the White Goddess. But the more definite beginnings were in Brian Striar's class on English Renaissance poetry where I discovered Ovid and a perplexing array of references to the Muses.

Where did they come from, I wondered? What purpose did they serve? Why are references to them so frequent in poetry from Ancient Greece to Renaissance England? I began a search to answer my personal questions about the nine sisters --goddesses of poetry.

Besides Professor Striar, there were many important influences at the University of North Florida. Sam Kimball taught me to look at a text separate from its author, so the Muses seemed to assume a life of their own, dancing, singing, and inspiring through the centuries. Gary Harmon helped me immeasurably with my writing and encouraged my independent thinking. Bill Slaughter helped me feel less fearful of poetic influence--a fear based on reading the poems of and biographies about Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. But the true father of this project was Allen Tilley, who agreed to chair the committee and remains a fountainhead of intellectual influences.

I am pleased to make my small contribution to the public domain of the University of North Florida.

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Abstract

Tracing the influences and references to the Muses in written language from Ancient Greece through the end of the English Renaissance, I discover transformations and revivals in their usage. There are shifts from dependence on deified inspiration to the development of personal insight. Also, there appears to be a conscious substituting of the Muses with the beloved and Cupid or Apollo. But the Muses' religious significance returns in Paradise Lost.

The first part of this thesis focuses on the early Greek writers: Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Plato, and the Latin writers: Ovid, Virgil, Boethius. The second part addresses the English poetic tradition from Chaucer through Milton. The poets cited for this section are Chaucer, Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne, Marlowe and Milton.

Presentations of the Muses or a personally chosen muse during these literary periods display conceptions of what originally motivates literary creation. I cover both the epic and lyric poetic traditions.

The Muses--Introduction

Popular culture often mentions a muse as a helper of the creative process. Bernadette Peters appears as a personified muse in Woody Allen's Alice, and Robert Wallace states: "All poets must learn ...from their own experience, how to court their muse, how to draw from the mysterious source, whatever it is, deep within themselves "(284). I will examine notions about this "mysterious source" from Ancient Greece to Milton.

When being struck with inspiration, poets are often described as finding their muse. This poetic tradition has a long history in which the muse is synonymous with the creative voice. Tracing the history of the Muses in our literary tradition, I find transformations which parallel literary movements in Western culture. The increasing sense of self as a creative being separate from deified inspiration is one pattern which appears in literature from Ancient Greece to late Roman periods, and in the English tradition from Chaucer to Donne.

Milton revives the belief in a creative source outside of the self in Paradise Lost; therefore, the patterns of muse use are both linear and cyclical in the history of literature. Robert Graves' ideas on "true poets" as devotees of the Muses is this century's revival of a Greek idea (24).

Part I

The Muses in Greek and Latin Literature-- From Deified Chorus to "Hysterical Sluts"

The Greek Muses enter Western literature with their greatest force in Hesiod's Theogony. Hesiod tells how "they breathed a voice into [him] and power to sing the story of things of the future, and things past" (31-2). In Theogony the Muses are named "Kleio and Euterpe, Thaleia and Melpomene, Terpsichore and Erato, Polymnia and Ourania, with Kalliope, who of all holds the highest position"(77). Hesiod describes their lineage and birth. These daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne are more than agents of inspiration in Theogony; they are the givers of knowledge and voice. The evocative opening to Theogony describes the sisters in great detail. Hesiod's Muses are primarily of the mountain of Helicon, where they dance, "wash their tender bodies" and "put a veiling of deep mist upon them, and walk in the night, singing in sweet voices" (97-9).

The first one hundred and four lines of Theogony seem set apart from the rest of the text dealing primarily with the genealogy of the Gods. Robert Lamberton surmises

this "prooimia" is a common invocation used by devotees of the Muses, maybe even added later to encourage poetry festivals in Helicon (45-8). Clearly, the Muses are a focal part of the Hesiodic tradition.

The Homeric and Hesiodic age is our main source for the oral tradition in Western culture. The Muses sing the tales of creation to Hesiod and are "mistresses of words" (Th. 29). The literary works we have today derive from the memories of storytellers--hence the significance of being born of Memory. In Ancient Greece, the sources of creative inspiration are born of Mnemosyne and the sky God, Zeus. Creative activity is a gift, sometimes unasked for, from deities. Hesiod is visited while "shepherding his lambs " (Th.23). Unlike his successors, he did not ask for them to come. The Muses strike him with their singing words and he must do their bidding.

Hesiod's relationship with the Muses stimulates much literary scholarship. William G. Thalmann focuses on the authority given to those who claim to have messages from goddesses and the social value given to those words (134-156). Lamberton thinks: "The Muses might be taken as poetic personifications of the qualities of the poet's art, goddesses only as a function of his self-gratulatory hyperbole" (2). Pietro Pucci uses the Muses' words, "' we know how to say many false things that seem like true sayings, / but we know also how to

speak the truth when we wish to '" (Th.27) as a frame for reading the entire text as presenting the paradoxes involved in gifts from the gods and goddesses (1-44). Jenny Strauss Clay examines the differences between what the Muses tell Hesiod to sing and the final outcome of what Hesiod tells. These scholars do not appear comfortable with seeing the Greeks as superstitious cult followers who might actually worship the Muses.

But like other Greek deities, the Muses have the power to punish those who think they can surpass the gods. Gilbert Murray notes a punishment in Homer's The Iliad. "Thamyris the Thracian, who boasted with his new-fangled sort of poetry to surpass the Muses : 'And they in wrath made him a maimed man, and took away his heavenly song and made him forget his harping'" (33). Murray finds this significant because it suggests that lameness can completely disable the poet, therefore showing the connection between poetry and dance, and he speculates the Muses were associated with the Molpe, a combined dance and song (28-51).

Also dealing with the Muses connection with music, a recent theorist, Julian Jaynes, explains his understanding of the musical connection in early poetry as "excitation to the divine speech area" in a "true prophetic trance." Hesiod might see and hear Muses because his brain was not bicamerally developed. Jaynes thinks poetry referred to

as song relates to the use of the lyre "while later poetry is often referred to as spoken or told" (369). He believes a change in instrument from the lyre to a stick called "rhapodoi" began the rhapsodic tradition and later "the poet as singer and his poem as song are brought back metaphorically as a conscious archaism, yielding its own authorization to the now conscious poet" (370).

Jaynes' theories are an interesting way to explain the change in consciousness, but fail to give account of how music aids conscious memory, even in learning the alphabet. But creative inspiration as divinely ordained and musical in form in early Greek Literature are crucial points in understanding the transformations the Muses go through in later times.

In Ancient Greece, the gift from the nine sisters is a blessed one, arising from Goddesses. Ernst Robert Curtius believes "they were once vital forces. They had their priests, their servants, their promise--and their enemies" (228-29). The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics states that by the third century, B.C. "the festival of the Heliconian Muses at Thespia was patronized by Athens and the important guild artists of Dionysus; here all the poetic and musical talent of Greece was consecrated" (533). The Muses in the Greek tradition were, therefore, cult figures which had some following.

There is a humble submission to the Muses in Hesiodic and Homeric poetry. Homer says: "O ye Muses who have your home in Olympus! You also are divine, you are present among us" (Il. 2. 31). Homer's Muses are particularly Olympian, and do not speak for themselves as do Hesiod's, who say: "You shepherds of the wilderness, poor fools, nothing but bellies" (Th.26). But Homer states of the Muses, "you know all things; but we hear only a rumour and know nothing at all!" (Il.2. 31).

Homer and Hesiod reveal a willing dependence on "these mistresses of words"(Th.29) in these passages, which call on the heavenly daughters for help in giving the memory of the past. William Anderson comments on the importance of using memories from the past in new ways and sees it as a positive feature of most great art. The Homeric epics will differ from the Hesiodic, because the decorum of Homeric and Hesiodic verse differ, but the dependence on the female deities is very similar.

Homeric tradition presents a blind poet with a sweet voice, while the Hesiodic tradition gives more skills in ending arguments to those who have a gift from the Muses. But both traditions credit the female deities with giving songs to tell of things past and this gift makes the poet "presently forget his cares, / he no longer remembers / sorrow, for the gifts of the goddesses / soon turn his thoughts elsewhere "(Th.102-3).

Homer differs from Hesiod on the blindness issue. Unlike Demodocus in the Odyssey, Hesiod is not "struck blind," but given knowledge and voice from the Muses. Both the Homeric and Hesiodic traditions give the Muses credit for the stories the poets know. Homeric tradition focuses on the memory given from the sisters, while Hesiod's includes giving voice, truth, knowledge, and an ability to end arguments. The Muses "cast their eyes and bestow favors" (Th. 82) and those favored "can put a quick and expert end to a great quarrel" (Th. 87) with "gentle argument" (Th. 91).

E.R. Dodds, likewise, finds the Muses connection with truth crucial in Hesiod. "The gift, then, of the Muses, or one of their gifts, is the power of true speech. And that is just what they told Hesiod when he heard their voice on Helicon" (81). These truthsayers might try to explain the talent for remembering in an oral age. As Dodds states: "vision of the past, like insight into the future, remained a mysterious faculty, only partially under its owner's control, and dependent in the last resort on divine grace" (81).

Later, in the period from Archilocus through Pindar, J.A. Davison finds:

The Muses never speak through the lips of the poet. Poetry, though ultimately the gift of God through the Muses, comes immediately from the

poet himself; what the Muses teach him must be blended with the products of his own mind into a harmonious whole; but if he strays one hairbreath from the truth, of which the Muses, as the daughters of Zeus and Memory, are the final arbiters, he will answer to them. (296-7)

In his many shorter works, Pindar combines the heroic elements of Homer and the personal relationship with Muses of Hesiod. The Muses in Pindar's works have an unusual maternal element, as in "Nemea 3," which begins "Lady and Muse, our Mother," or as in his first Olympian ode "The best healer for struggles of pain...is happiness; and wise songs / daughters of the Muses, stroke one with hands of gentleness" (112). The Muses and their daughters are helpers of the creative process. Pindar writes: "The Muse is nursing me a javelin marvellously valiant and strong " (Bowra 13). When finding a new combination for his poetry to acclaim the heroes in Olympia, he writes: "Even so, I ween, hath the Muse stood beside me, when I found out a fashion that is still bright and new" (O1.3. 6-7).

Pindar uses the conventions of epic in a new way. The goddesses of song are presences, but not dictators. Like music, they comfort, aid, and inspire. But the poet is more aware of himself than the voices articulated as Homer and Hesiod.

Current theories, based on the work of Milman Parry, suggest that Homer and Hesiod should not be considered

individuals but a series of followers of the two schools of Ionian or Boiotian epic. The poets' individuality is of little importance; they are seen as reciters of learned texts. It seems likely there were a series of Hesiodic poets. The mythic stature of both Homer and Hesiod shows in the popularity of a tale about a contest between the two in Khaikis, where the crowd favors Homer but Hesiod wins because the judge thinks his stories more beneficial for humankind.¹ Plato will take an attitude critical of both series of texts and be harder on the Hesiodic tradition.

Our Western tradition favors the heroic Homer rather than the repetition of seductions and births presented in Hesiod's Theogony. Anthologies for undergraduates seldom include Hesiodic work. Many high school students read The Iliad and The Odyssey. Yet, Theogony is the "Genesis" of Greek deities.

Of particular interest today, Theogony provides the link between the old European female Goddess, Gaia, and the Olympians. Gaia is the great creator giving birth to all that follows, but the material is not used by those proposing a matrifocal Neolithic period.²

Theogony is not read because it is not a gripping heroic story, unless one considers how Cronus castrates his father because of his mother's request and Zeus overcomes the Titans. It fails as a story because the work, as a whole, does not follow the plot snake discovered

by Allen Tilley which mirrors human life in most of our literature. Our tradition favors the heroic conqueror, not the Muses giving voice and the mother telling the son what to do. Theogony is a list of origins and births, not plotted heroic expansion.

Lamberton explains how Pope remythified Homer but "Hesiod was not so fortunate and remained an odd but representative figure--the spokesman for the claims of the Greek tradition, but now a persona without a poem, the visionary shepherd-poet, but virtually unread" (157). Hesiod may have won the prize in the legendary contest, but Homer is our main source of Greek influence.

Plato displays a preference for Homer over Hesiod, but he distrusts both series of texts as delivering truth. Plato desires repression of influences which are negative for society and reasonable individuals. He finds aspects of Homeric and Hesiodic texts disturbing. He is particularly bothered by the way Cronus comes to power. In The Republic, Plato explains that the castration of Cronus in Theogony should be censured.

First of all, I said, there was the greatest of all lies, in high places, which the poet told about Uranus, and which was a bad lie too,--I mean what Hesiod says that Uranus did, and how Cronus retaliated on him. The doings of Cronus, and the suffering which in turn his son inflicted upon him, even if they were true, ought certainly not be lightly told to young and thoughtless persons; if possible, they had better be buried in silence. (2.378)

Plato suggests these "extremely objectionable" stories should become obsolete. That Uranus didn't want his children to be born and kept pushing them back in Gaia and that she showed the sickle to Uranus and asked her son to kill his father should be repressed. Plato, in this writing, has already removed Gaia from the text.

But the Muses are still a present force in poetic life in Plato's writings, even if a disturbing one which leads to madness. Plato writes extensively about creative inspiration and is less trusting of this influence as a positive force than are the poets. Many of our current stereotypes of creative people are consistent with the following depiction in Plato's Phaedrus.

There is a third form of possession or madness, of which the Muses are the source. This seizes a tender, virgin soul and stimulates it to rapt passionate expression, especially in lyric poetry, glorifying in countless mighty deeds of ancient times for the instruction of posterity. But if any man come to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses, persuaded that skill alone will make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity with him be brought to nought by the poetry of madness, and behold, their place is nowhere to be found.
(245)

In this passage, Plato sees poetic inspiration as a sort of mental instability, but as a necessary evil for creating lasting works of literary art. The lyric poets are

possessed by a demon of creativity. This picture of the poet contrasts with that of Homer, who says: "the man of song whom the Muse cherished; by her gift he knew the good of life, and evil ..." (Od 8. 76-79). In Theogony the Muses' presence in barons leads to "straight decisions, and, by an unfaltering declaration / can put a quick and expert end even / to a great quarrel" (Th.86-7).

Plato seeks to separate those who are mouthpieces of the God from those who are skillful professionals in Ion, which relates a discussion between Socrates and Ion. Plato examines the contradictions between personal action and divine inspiration. He wedges a schism between the poet as a skilled artist and as a vehicle for God. This will become a key issue for poets in later ages: Does poetry come from an individual identity or is it divinely and externally inspired?

Plato presents the Muses as the primary source for poetic inspiration in numerous works. Besides Phaedrus, extensive references are found in Plato's Ion, an amazingly ironized text depicting Socrates undermining the knowledge of the rhapsode, Ion. Socrates argues that because Ion is only interested in Homer and not in Hesiod or Archilochus, he is possessed by a sort of Homeric chain which gives him knowledge and voice to act out Homeric stories. He states further a conception linking poetry and lack of intellect:

The middle ring is you, the rhapsode or actor, and the first one is the poet himself. The god pulls people's souls through all these whenever he wants,...One poet is attached to one Muse, another to another (we may say he is "possessed," and that's enough, for he is held)...You see it's not because you're a master of knowledge about Homer that you can say what you say, but because of a divine gift, because you are possessed... (533d)

Plato undermines the knowledge of Ion throughout this work with rhetorical logic. He separates poetry from professional knowledge and discounts the poetic occupations. Plato does not trust this chain of poetic knowledge, but sees the recipients as driven by a "'magnetic' stone." He describes poets as "servants" of their God. He applies this principle to both epic and lyric poets.

In describing lyric poets, Plato has Socrates saying:

For of course poets tell us that they gather songs at honey-flowing springs, from glades and gardens of the Muses,...For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer with him...so that we who hear should know that they are not the ones who speak those verses that are of such high value, for their intellect is not in them; the god himself is the one who speaks, and he gives voice through them to us. (534b-d)

Plato writes that poems are "of such high value," but does not think the poet should be given any credit. He is a carrier of the sweet sounds, not a creator. The creator is a male god who gives voice. Although the Muses are the

attributable goddesses at the beginning of the passage, by the end Plato must have some male deity in mind for the sound in the poet's ear, probably Zeus, the primary God of Olympia; Apollo, the patron of poetry; or Dionysus, the god connected to rhapsodic recitation with the help of alcohol.

Some critics think Plato is unusual in this assertion. Paul Woodruff states: "This idea, that poets are not responsible for their work and that they do not know what they are saying, is more radical than anything we find in the poetry of inspiration. It is probably a new idea with Plato" (8). But, the Muses are given credit for the voice and the knowledge in Theogony and the Iliad. Also, if individual poets assumed the name of Hesiod and Homer in Ancient Greece, they are not taking credit for what they say. It is an honor to be divinely inspired and part of Plato's described chain to the Muse. Plato argues that repeating the words of Homer is separate from the intellect of self-directed knowledge.

Paradoxically, in the Republic, Plato desires a repression of the same stories which are divinely inspired. For his ideal state, censorship must protect the ears of the young from hearing the arguments and family violence of mythic stories. But if the reciter or rhapsodes are possessed, how can they prevent the outpouring of ancient

song? Paradoxes between this text and others of Plato led nineteenth century scholars to invalidate the Ion as a Platonic text, according to Woodruff (5). However, Ion discredits poetry as an intellectual exercise. In a philosophic age, Plato argues that the acclaim given to reciters of ancient song is overblown and easily outdone by the crafty rhetorician.

Plato also discusses the Muses in connection with the cicadas, which can survive without food or drink because they descended from a group of men, who died when they became "unhinged by pleasure" from the Muses' songs. When the cicadas die, they report to the muse which represents whatever area they most honor.

To Terpsichore they report those who have honored her in choral dance, and make them dearer to her; to Erato, those who have honored her in the affairs of love; and to the other Muses similarly, according to the form of honour belonging to each; but to Calliope, the eldest, and to Ourania who comes after her, they announce those who spend their time in philosophy and honor... (Phaedrus 259).

Plato reiterates the importance of song and dance when discussing the Muses, even claiming "the birth of the Muses and the appearance of song" are simultaneous. But his commentaries on the sisters sometimes contradict one another. "Philosophic study" and musical observance seem less rhapsodic than depictions of the Muses' influences in his other references to poetic inspiration.

The specific functions attached to the names from Hesiod's list may have begun here, but there is little consistency in the application, especially in the works of Virgil. In Book VII of The Aeneid, he entreats:

"Now, Erato, be with me, let me sing of kings and times and of the state of things in ancient Latium...O goddess, help your poet" (45-50). Virgil gives a specific function to Erato, apparently the telling of history and war. But in contradiction with this passage, he later uses Calliope for the same purpose:

O you, Calliope, and all the Muses
do you, I pray, inspire me: I must sing
of the slaughter and the deaths that
Turnus spread with his word across the
field of battle, of those each fighting
man sent down to hell; unroll with me
the mighty scroll of war. You, goddesses,
remember, you can tell. (9.696-702)

Calliope assumes the head position attributed to her in Theogony. Virgil returns to the format of Hesiod.

But The Aeneid follows the Homeric tradition more closely than the Hesiodic in subject matter and its invoking of muses. Virgil calls on the sisters combining elements of both traditions: "O goddesses, now open Helicon / And guide my song" (7.847-48) derives from Hesiod, while "For goddesses, you can remember and retell; the slender / breath of that fame can scarcely reach us" (7.847-849)

is reminiscent of Homer. As in both Homeric and Hesiodic works, the Muses provide needed help in memory and knowledge of the Gods. In the first book, Virgil pleads:

Tell me the reason, Muse; what was the
wound to her divinity, so hurting her
that she, the queen of gods, compelled a
man remarkable for goodness to endure so
many crises, meet so many trials?
Can such resentment hold the mind of
gods? (14-18)

These two passages emulate the Greek epic tradition in their humble seeking of memory.

Virgil presents his devotion to the Muses earlier in his writing career in Georgics when stating, "Before all things may the sweet muses, whose priest I am and whose great love hath smitten me, take to themselves and show me the pathways of the sky..." (320). The Muses give Virgil love of poetry rather than strike him blind or tell him what to say.

Ovid's relationship with the Muses is less "smitten." Ovid puts the Muses in competition with the God of Love, Cupid, in the opening of Amores:

Arms, warfare, violence-I was winding up to produce a
Regular epic, with verse-form to match-
Hexameters, naturally. But Cupid (they say) with a
snicker
Lopped off one foot from each alternate line.
'Nasty young brat, 'I told him, 'who made you
Inspector of meters?
We poets come under the Muses, we're not in
your mob. (1-5)

But Cupid wins this round of poetic inspiration and helps Ovid with his erotic poems in lyric form. Cupid's arrows are more potent than the Muses' voices. Eros intervenes in young Ovid's life and, perhaps, begins a tradition of muse substitution during this momentous moment in literary history.

... 'Hey poet! he called, 'you want a theme? Take that!'
 His shafts-worse luck for me- never miss their
 target;
 I'm on fire now, Love owns the freehold of my
 heart.

 Come on then, my Muse, bind your blonde hair with
 a wreath of
 Sea-myrtle, and lead me off in the six-five groove!
 (24-30).

Ovid decides with Cupid's arrows to write love poetry, not epic.

Ovid discovers there are advantages to the poetic profession in wooing women. In The Art of Love, he begs girlfriends not to expect presents, but "unswerving love" and "vehement passions." He asks women not to expect ambition or "stratagems and deceptions." Ovid describes poetic nature:

...Our natures are made more pliant
 By our gentle art: an attitude to life
 Grows from our studies, So, girls, be generous
 with poets:
 They're the Muses' darlings, contain
 A divine spark. God is in us, we have dealings
 with heaven:
 Our inspiration descends
 From celesial realms...(545-551).

Ovid repeats the belief of divine blessings presented by other poets, but utilizes it in a different fashion. Instead of fulfilling a public role of telling the history of the past, Ovid enlists poetry to woo the woman. He uses male desire as a focal point of motivation. While Hesiod's gift helps end quarrels and tells the story of creation, Ovid's divine sparks facilitate the attainment of his personal desires.

Like the Renaissance poets who will imitate him, Ovid is a poet inspired by an individual woman, in his case named Corinna. It is not a voice in his ear or a divine chain of memories from goddesses, but the effect of eros. The piercing arrows of Venus' son direct him to write how he feels when courting a married woman.

Unlike Virgil, when Ovid does write his epic, he does not follow the proclamation of Hesiod to begin and end his work with an invocation to the Muses. Ovid lives under the shadow of Virgil, often commenting on the popularity and long-term value of The Aeneid. "And so long as Rome's empire holds sway over the nations, / Virgil's country poems, his Aeneid, will be read" (Amores 1.15. 25). Unlike Virgil and Homer, however, Ovid chooses to portray goddesses rather than national heroes when telling the mythic stories in The Metamorphoses. His personifications bring new life to the Greek deities, which in this text are agents of perpetual transformation.

Particularly striking, however, is the decline in importance of the Greek Muses. The change in status for the nine sisters from Hesiod to Ovid is dramatic. In the fifth book of Ovid's Metamorphoses, Minerva visits the Muses in Helicon to see if the story of a new spring created by Pegasus's hoof is true. The nine sisters of song welcome her, as she admires their home. One sister tells her:

'Tritonian Pallas, you who would have been one of our company, had not your courage directed you to greater tasks, what you say is true, and you are right to praise our pursuits and our home. Ours is indeed a happy lot, if only we may enjoy it safely. But there is no limit to what wicked men may do, and so unprotected women have all manner of cause for fear. Constantly before my eyes, I seem to see grim Pyreneus; even yet, I have not completely recovered myself, after that adventure.' (269-75)

The muse relates the tale of Pyreneus luring them into his house so they could get out of the rain, only to "lay violent hands upon us. By taking to our wings, we escaped his assault" (298). The once potent forces of Hesiod now live in fear. They are objects to be lusted after, and fear male attacks. The Muses also use the self-effacing mode of telling Athena they have less courage and lesser tasks than their half sister. They seem more domesticated and focused on their happy home. The voice in the head of the shepherd is in this tale a group of self-effacing housewives. But Ovid does introduce a mode of escape by giving them wings.

Besides fearing men, the Muses now face competition from other women. The next story relates how the nine daughters of the rich landowner, Pierus, force the Muses into competition by bragging that their number indicates they are as great as the goddesses. During the competition, the stories both sides tell reveal their allegiances. A muse relates the stories of the daughters of Pierus and Euipe.

'She told how Typhoeus issued forth from the the very depths of the earth, and filled the inhabitants of heaven with terror; how the gods all fled, till the land of Egypt and the Nile with its seven separate mouths gave them refuge in their weariness. Even here, the earthborn giant Typhoeus pursued them, and they concealed themselves under false shapes.' (324-30))

The potential usurpers turn the goddesses and gods into animals, much like icons of Egypt and Rome of Ovid's time with animal-headed figurines. The story relates the Olympians must disguise themselves and run. It suggests their time is passing.

When Athena shows interest in hearing the tale, Calliope, chosen to lead them, tells, they sing how she

...rose to her feet, an ivy wreath binding her flowing locks, and ran her thumb over the plaintive strings: then she sang this song, accompanying herself with sweeping chords. 'Ceres was the first to break up the sods of earth with the crooked plough, she first planted corn and cultivated crops, she imposed the first laws of the world. All we have, we

owe to Ceres. Of her must I sing: I pray that my songs may be worthy of the goddess, for surely the goddess is worthy of my song.' (337-46)

The Muses tell the story of Ceres, the grain goddess, whom Pamela Gregory thinks is the successor to Gaia and the precursor to the cult of the Virgin Mary (16-23). The Muses sing for the pastoral life and, like the Boiotian tradition of Hesiod, are connected with agriculture and nature.

Ovid's propensity for focusing on the female characters is noted by Edgar M. Glenn, who states that The Metamorphoses has

two distinct but unbalanced parts: two hundred and fifty lines deal with a hero; four hundred and twenty-seven lines have to do with goddesses. The first section treats of killing and presents the male attitude; the second, gives, for the most part, the women's interests and views. (63)

But, as can be seen in the case of the Muses, the goddesses are less powerful, more vulnerable to attack, and more like human women seen by the poet, even if they do have the power to change Pierus' daughters into magpies. The poet is no longer humbled in a dependence on the Muse's memory in Ovid. He no longer repeats remembered songs heard in his head, but reacts to what he sees with passion in his love poems. Likewise, his epic tale of perpetual transformations is visual rather than aural.

The visual emphasis can, perhaps, explain the change in focus of poetry from early Greek to Roman times and the transformations of the Muses from deities of poetic song to objects of lust for Pyreneus. The late oral tradition of Plato's time already begins to devalue memorized song as individual creation. When the individual poets put words on the page, what is seen becomes as important as what is heard. What is told is increasingly seen in words. The cults of poetic worship may decrease as the individual assumes more importance. Although the Greeks have a wonderful parade of individual creators, like Sappho and Pindar, writing from personal experience, the tradition of the creative individual is much stronger in Roman times, and allows an extreme contrast between Horace and Ovid. The personal identities of Homer and Hesiod are problematic, which certainly is not the case in late Greek and Roman times.

Plato dominates Greek conceptions of poetic inspiration. In Ion, Phaedrus, and The Republic, Plato seeks to diminish the value of rhapsodes and ancient battles between Gaia and Uranus. He shows a preference for Homer over Hesiod in his works. This preference began before him, certainly, but is entrenched in Western Culture after Plato's time. Hesiod is the poet most connected with the Muses. Lamberton reports that parts of works attributed to Hesiodic tradition are added later to encourage poetry festivals (31-33). Because

Homer's Muses are more Olympian than Hesiod's, Plato's preference becomes important as the Muses are increasingly supplanted for the son of God, Apollo.

In the Iliad, Homer has Apollo as an accompanist to the Muses: "...a splendid harp with Apollo to play it, and the Muses singing turn by turn in their lovely voices" (1.699). Hesiod says: "So it is from the Muses, and from Apollo / of the far east / that there are men on earth who are poets" (Th.94). The Muses take top billing in the poetry and song department in most of the Greek literary tradition. But, as is true of most goddesses in Western culture, they increasingly lose importance after the Greek period as sons, Cupid and Apollo, assume more and more prominent positions.

After Christianity is firmly entrenched in Europe, medieval writers depict Apollo as a head of the Muses. There is some Greek precedence for this configuration. Davison finds that the poet will answer to the Muses "and to their leader, the Moloaye'ras Apollo," for whom it is not lawful to have dealings with falsehood "(297). In "To Pythian Apollo" of the Homeric Hymns, Apollo leads those gifted with the Muses' song to Parnassus (515-24). Graves outlines the lessening of importance of the Muses from "Great Goddess in her poetic or incantatory character" to Apollo's 'ladies in waiting'" (393).

By the Middle Ages, Latin writers distrust pagan goddesses and gods until they find ways for Pythagorean theories to justify the Muses as representatives of the nine spheres with Apollo as the head. Curtius states:

Pythagorean speculation interpreted the Muses as divinities of the celestial spheres. Thus they were included in eschatology of late pagan antiquity and became bestowers of immortality--not for all men but for those who had dedicated themselves to their service as poets, musicians, scholars or thinkers. (234)

Curtius outlines the Muse tradition in the Middle Ages, when pagan gods and goddesses are particularly suspect. He discovers a pattern of muse rejection.

The religious significance of the Muses during the decline of paganism is in all likelihood the fundamental reason for their express rejection by early Christian poetry. This rejection then becomes a poetic topos itself, the history of which can be traced from the fourth to the seventeenth centuries. It is an index of the rise and fall of ethical and dogmatic rigorism. It is frequently connected with the attempt to find a Christian substitute for the antique Muses. (234)

This rejection and substitution of the Muses is blatant in Boethius' The Consolation of Philosophy. Boethius introduces his popular work with a visit from an inspiring female representing philosophy. This woman of "imperious authority" says of the Muses of Poetry:

to approach this sick man's bedside. They have no medicine to ease his pains, only sweetened poisons to make them worse. These are the very women who kill the rich and fruitful harvest of Reason with the barren thorns of Passion. They habituate men to their sickness of mind instead of curing them. (36)

Philosophy tells the Muses to leave the man who "has been nourished on the philosophies of Zeno and Plato." She calls the daughters of memory "sirens" with "deadly enticements." The conception of the Muses as antagonistic to reason is almost an antithesis of their presentation in early Greek literature and conflicts with their association with knowledge and truth. It also conflicts with the original meaning of their name, which Farnell points out is "mindful" (434-47). But the Muses as dangerous influences are akin to Plato's ideas about creative inspiration.

In Consolation, Boethius does what Ovid did in the Amores; he signals he is not going to follow the epic poetic tradition of Homer and Virgil. Both men attribute inspiration to a deity, but find substitutes. Ovid uses Cupid, while Boethius finds his own Lady of Philosophy. Both men use the word "muse" for the substitute. Philosophy tells the Muses of Poetry: "'be gone, and leave him for my own Muses to heal and cure'" (36). Ovid states: "Come on then, my Muse, bind your blonde hair with a wreath of / sea-myrtle, and lead me off in the six-five groove!" (1.1.39).

In summary, from early Greek to medieval Latin, the Muses of Hesiod undergo many changes. Is their decline in importance related to a switch from poetry with music to poetry without, as Jaynes suggests? Could the change be explained by the increasing importance of philosophy and the declining belief of poetry as truth, as seen in Plato and Boethius? Perhaps these are factors, but also crucial is the poet or philosopher's belief in himself, and an ability to choose his own influences. Ovid chooses Cupid and Boethius chooses Philosophy. Virgil follows the Homeric form and remains for successors the example of epic form.

We will never know if early Greeks really believed in the Muses as deities giving knowledge, any more than we know if church attendance is a sign of true belief. But the Muses were more connected with poetic theology and ritual in Greece than they are in later beliefs of creative inspiration. What survives from the Hesiodic works is the injunction from the Muses: "to put themselves at the beginning and end" (Th.34) of poetic works. Many poets will heed this advice from antiquity, but their muses will more likely be those of Homer and Plato, Virgil and Ovid, than Hesiod.

Part Two

The Muses in English Poetry from Chaucer to Milton--
 From Emblematic Ornaments to Psychological Process

The English inherited much muse lore from both the classical and medieval periods. Most English poets from Chaucer to Milton were strictly educated in Latin. Gregory calls the Muses part of "a kind of poetic shorthand, a way of saying certain things quickly and formulaically so that they were immediately understood by the audience for whom they were intended" (Milton.4). Gregory also finds: "The word, *musa*, -ae, was the first Latin noun Milton learned to decline, being the paradigmatic first-declension noun in Lily's grammar(22). So the Greek Muses of Hesiod had by the English Renaissance become a convention which represent the poet's learned knowledge of classical material.

Although the English Renaissance is most connected with this classical training, evidence of Chaucer's classical influences appear in his poetry. In The House of Fame, Chaucer presents Calliope: "So song the myghty Muse, she / That cleped ys Calliope, / And hir eighte sustren

eke" (365). The Muses are a chorus singing the acclaim of a personified figure named Fame. But why does Chaucer use Calliope rather than Clio, the Muse more commonly representing Fame in medieval mythographies?

Phillipa Hardman explains that Calliope "stands for the completion of the search for knowledge, the eventual utterance of the scholar's labour..." (483). This idea derives from the work of Fulgentius, a mythographer with whom most scholars think Chaucer was familiar. Hardman explains Fulgentius' classification of the nine Muses as

...nine stages of literary activity, which are as follows:(i) Clio--to wish for knowledge; (ii) Euterpe--to delight in it; (iii) Melpomene--to mediate and persevere; (iv) Talia--to hold to it; (v) Polyhymnia--to commit it to memory; (vi) Erato--to find one's own analogy; (vii) Terpsichore--to judge one's findings;(viii) Urania--to select of one's judgements; (ix) Calliope--to utter one's selection. (483)

Therefore, the Muses continue to represent the creative process, but the emphasis is on scholarship, not deified inspiration. The influences and inspiration come from learning and judging earlier works. Calliope is a voice for the synthesis of materials in House of Fame.

Chaucer uses the Muses and several substitutes in a more varied manner in Troilus. In this retelling of a famous tale, Chaucer opens each section with various Muses or Furies and Fates. Influenced by Boethius and

Boccaccio, and their separation between positive and negative muses, there are destructive Furies for painful sections and the original Greek deities of poetry for more hopeful episodes. As Hardman states: "Chaucer uses his references to the Muses to help chart the narrator's changing attitude to his story, and his ever-increasing emotional involvement with the fortunes of his characters" (493).

Even though Chaucer uses the Muses to foreshadow, highlight mood, and show a culmination of learning, the nine sisters are more ornamental, rather classical sculptures depicting human endeavor than anima projections or sources for knowledge. There is little dependence on these classical figures so depended on in Hesiod and Virgil.



The nine Muses, the inspiring deities of song, depicted with their various attributes on an antique sarcophagus. Paris, Louvre.

from The Dictionary of Classical Mythology by

Pierre Grimal. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 298.

The Muses' ornamentality is even more evident during the Elizabethan Age, when Spenser uses them with some regularity. Spenser's Epithalamion demonstrates vividly the crowded mix of pagan and Christian symbolism often present in English Renaissance poetry. He opens his wedding song with the Muses:

Ye learned sisters which have oftentimes
 Beene to me ayding, others to adorne:
 Whom ye thought worthy of your graceful rhymes
 That even the greatest did not greatly scorne
 To heare theyre names sung in your simple layes'
 But joyed in theyr prayse. (1-5)

Even if the Muses aid Spenser, they are part of a whole family of pagan representations from Hymen to Nymphs which adorn the culmination of his Amoretti.

Spenser embodies all the Muses in his The Teares of the Muses, but their primary purpose is to bemoan the state of the arts, complaining of a lack of support from patrons. Interestingly, in Teares as well as in the Amoretti, he states the Muses are daughters of Apollo rather than Zeus. William Oram's footnote explains:

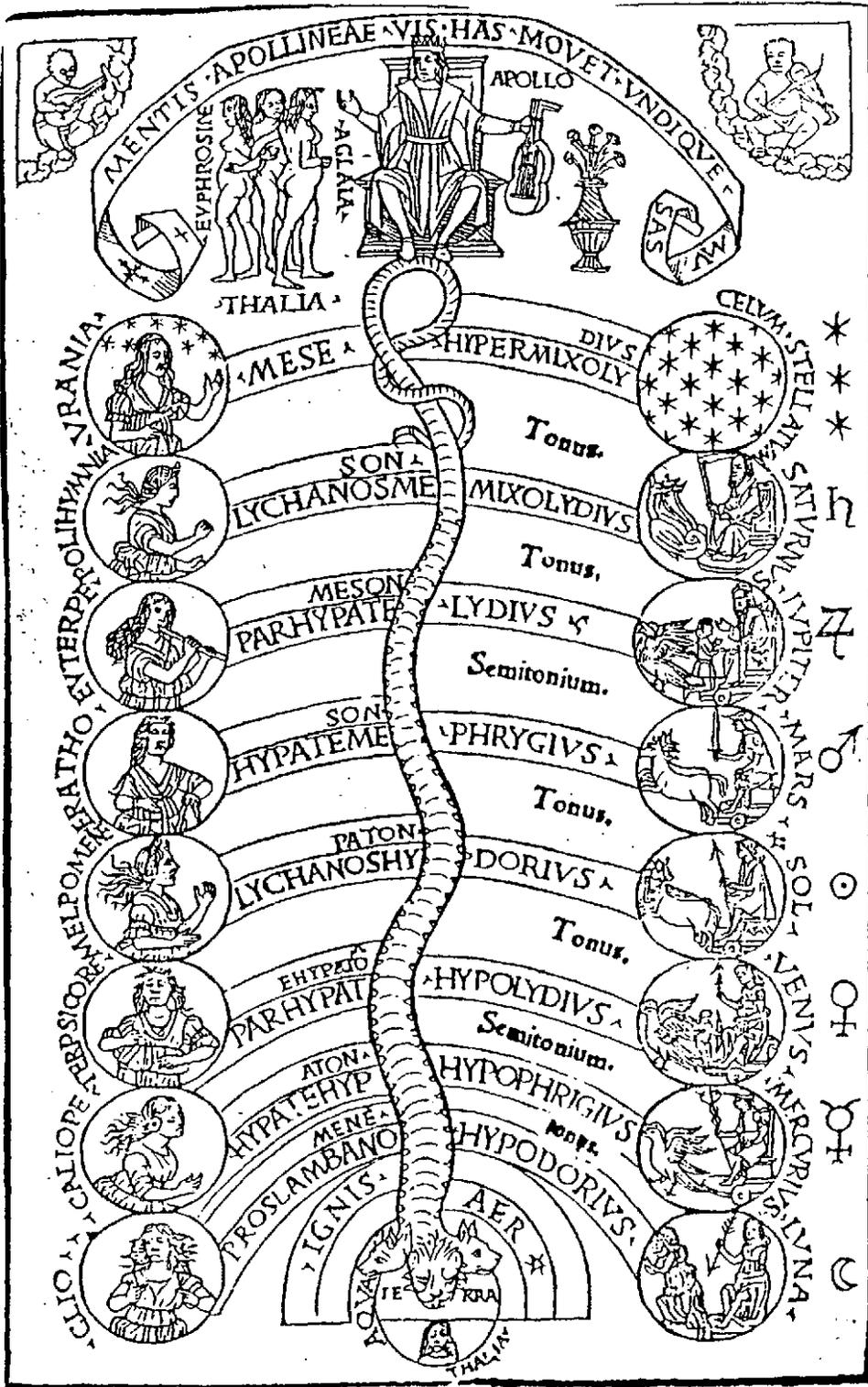
The importance of Apollo here may have been suggested by some pseudo-Virgilian Latin verses about the Muses which Sp almost certainly knew, and which list the Muses in the order he follows here. The verses view Apollo as a central creative source from which the individual Muses, like their various arts, take their being; 'The force of Apollo's mind moves the Muses in all ways / Phoebus remaining at the center embraces them all.' (269)

Spenser's ordering of the nine sisters is Clio, Melpomene, Thalia, Euterpe, Terpsichore, Erato, Calliope, Urania, Polyhymnia.

Woodcuts of the period show in pictorial form the importance of Apollo with the Muses. These depictions present the Muses as representations of the celestial planets with Apollo as the head. Woodcuts of the Renaissance bear a strong resemblance to medieval representations with a notable replacement of God with Jupiter and Jesus with Apollo. As Lee T. Pearcy explains:

The choir of ten, the Muses under Apollo's direction was a conventional symbol of the cosmic harmony of nine spheres (earth, seven planets, and fixed stars) under the direction of the mind of God as well as for human creation directed by the mind of the artist. (30)

Pearcy attributes this representation to Catari, who claims "the ancients called him the head or guide of the Muses" (33). But I have not found the ancients showing Apollo as the head of the Muses. I think this is a later emphasis to Christianize the sisters under a son. Rather than being directly connected with Zeus or God, the Muses need the son of Zeus as an intermediary after influences of Christianity. The Renaissance poets may have been more comfortable with classical influences, but the repatterning of the nine sisters under Apollo shows the



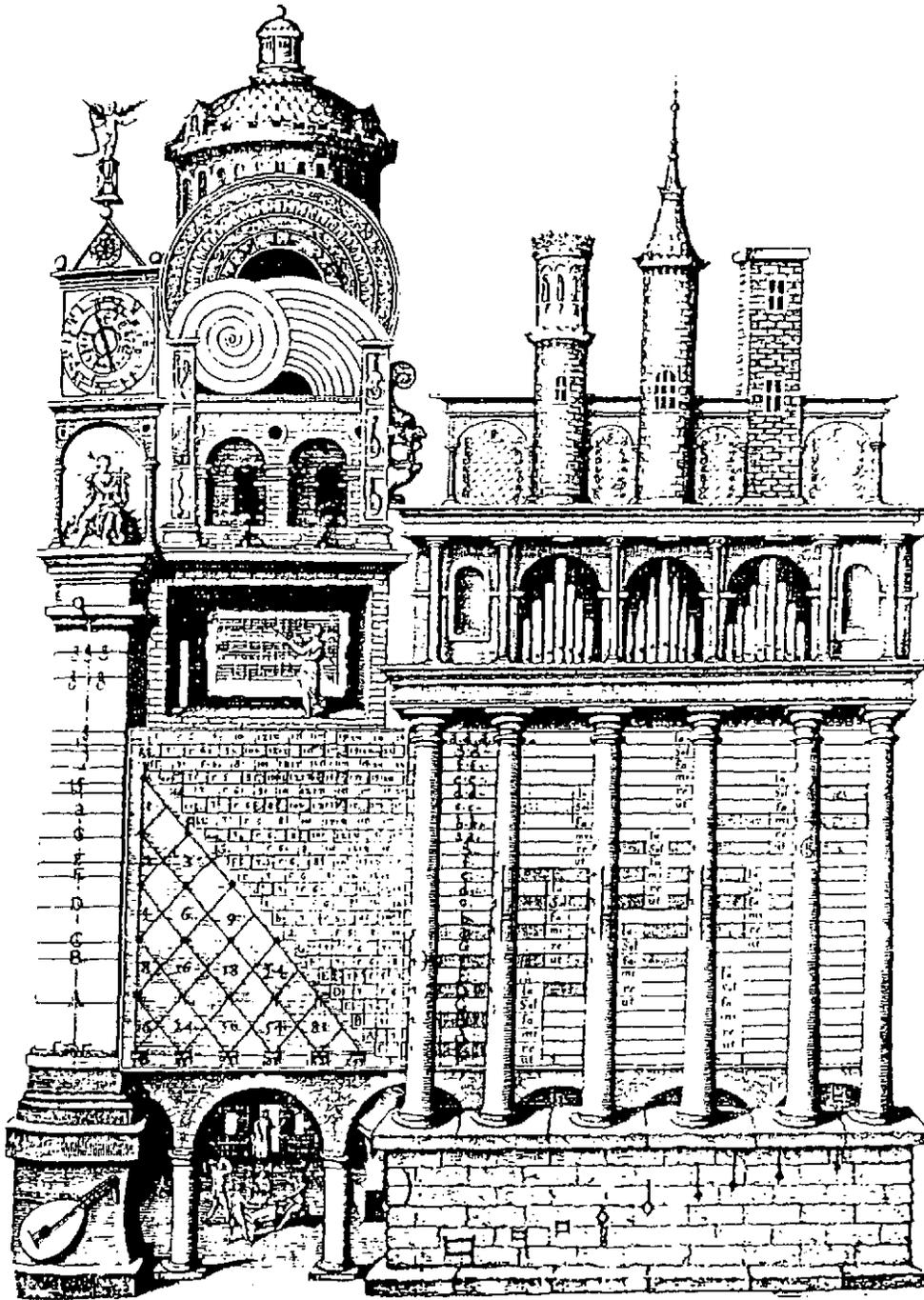
20. The Music of the Spheres, from Galurius's *Practica musica*, 1496

Fig. 2. from Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance. (New York: Barnes, 1968) n.p.

accepted norm of father-son as the dominant mode of divine inspiration. As Percy points out in discussing Sandys: "The myth of Apollo's presidency of the Muses reflects this relation between poetry and divine truth: Jupiter the divine mind, inspires Apollo; Apollo the Muses; and they their legitimate issue" (71). Renaissance poetic theology legitimizes the Muses by following Christian patterns.

Besides their original connection with truth, the Muses' association with music is, likewise, connected with Apollo when using the influences of Pythagorean theories. The enclosed woodcuts not only show Apollo as a godhead to the Muses, but represent scale and tone. In Fludd's depiction of "'Temple of Music,' Thalia points out the modes of church music" (61). The Muses' connection with music is revived during the Renaissance, but it is a more academic, intellectual, and pictorial connection than in Ancient Greece. The Muses are emblematic symbols, rather than religious icons, during the English Renaissance.

The female presence which assumes the prominent position in English poetry is the beloved, and she, likewise, has an intermediary through the other classical son of importance--Cupid. He is the most personified classical figure because of the emphasis on love poetry and the influence of Ovid's Amores. As in Ovid's first elegy, Cupid leads the Renaissance poets in their verse. Thomas Hyde states:



59 Robert Fludd,
Utriusque Cosmi. Temple of Music.

Fig. 3. from Maurice Hussey, The World of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries. (New York: Viking, 1971) 61.

Spenser's poetic theology is predominantly a theology of Cupid. Though not what Beatrice was to Dante or Laura to Petrarch, Cupid is nevertheless to Spenser an archimage, ...never merely a mythological ornament...(111)

If Cupid is the main classical deity of love poetry during the Renaissance, he is also the source for the debilitating beams of the beloved's eyes so prevalent in the Petrarchan tradition, including Spenser and Sidney. The blind figure, Cupid, seems to use the eyes of the beloved to shoot the arrows which drive the poets to write love poetry. Like Ovid, the Italian and English sonneteers are driven by eros, not by the intellectual voice-givers--the Muses. Seeing woman motivates the poets, not a voice in the ear, as in Homer and Hesiod. The voice is the poet's own, not a muse's. As Beatrice Johnson says of Sidney:

...the mythological figure which assumes special importance is the God of Love. The sonneteers refer repeatedly to Cupid, with his traditional associates; he shoots arrows from eyes, lights fires at them. Sidney constructs an extravagant scheme of military symbolism to represent the warfare of love. (85)

Again reminiscent of Ovid's erotic poems, fighting desire is the impetus, not a call for memory. The English example of this "warfare of love" is easily seen in Sidney's Astrophil and Stella.

In this Petrarchan sequence, Sidney describes himself as Cupid's slave, but also admits, "it is most true, what we call Cupid's dart, / An image is, which for our selves we carve" (5.5-6). Stella's eyes have the persistent power of Cupid's influence in the sonnet sequence. Some typical examples are: "Cupid, because thou shin'st in Stella's eyes" (12.1); "That inward sunne in thine eyes shineth so" (71.8); "Stella, in whose shining eyes, / Are the lights of Cupid's skies, / Whose beams where they once are darted, / Love therewith is streight imparted" (Eighth Song-33-36). Sidney follows Petrarchan sonnets in these images, but adds some self-reflection about Cupid and the Muses. He takes personal responsibility for the image he creates.

Like Ovid and Boethius, Sidney carefully identifies his relationship with a muse of his own choosing. Cupid is the director of Stella's beams, but Sidney's muse tells him at the end of the first sonnet of the sequence: "Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write." She tells him to write of love and, by sonnet 55, he addresses them directly.

Muses, I oft invoked your holy ayd,

 But now I meane no more your help to trie,
 Nor other surging of my speech to prove,
 But on her name incessantly to crie:
 For let me but name her whom I do love,

So sweete sounds straight mine eare and heart
do hit,
That I well find no eloquence like it. (1.9-14)

In Sidney's sonnet sequence the beloved is the main replacement for a muse.

Sidney takes a step beyond Spenser's sometimes confusing following of classical conventions when the beloved and the muse entwine, as in the opening Amoretti: "And happy rymes bath'd in the sacred brooke, / Of Helicon whence she derived is" (8-10). Is Spenser's beloved, like the Muses, from Helicon? By stating he is going to look within himself, Sidney has taken a step that will go further in Shakespeare, and further yet in Donne: a recognition of the self in the poetic persona. As Johnson points out:

All the writers of sonnet cycles refer to their lady as their muse, Shakespeare calling her the tenth muse. Certain references to the Muse, however, appear to reflect something of the actual attitude of the poet toward his work--the term muse being interpreted as the state of mind conducive to creating, the contemplative mind being thereby freed from all disturbing elements, and produces (sic) a silent psychology of effectiveness. (87)

Therefore, although the Muses lose their theological importance, the poets of the Renaissance and after restore and maintain the use of the Muses as a psychological state up until the present time

when we commonly use "muse" in verb form to indicate an absorbed state of mind. This idea comes from the Greeks and the original word means "mindful one." As Farnell further explains, muse is

...a word that belongs to the psychic domain, not the world of things. Its denotation may at first have been impersonal, marking the mental tension that relieves itself in prophecy and song; then as this was a mysterious 'demonic' condition it would be explained as the psychical effect of some power of the unseen world that acts on our minds from without and the word would acquire a personal-divine significance. (435)

Sidney and Shakespeare use their muses to indicate difficulty with inspiration. Shakespeare has extensive discussions with his muse in his sonnets, where he shows the pleasure and disappointments of dealing with this singular presence. The relationship seems to accelerate, peak, and decline from Sonnets 78 through 103, in which the most references to her are found. In these sonnets she is "invoked," provides "fair assistance," and is "sick." By Sonnet 82, Shakespeare states: "I grant thou wert not married to my Muse." In Sonnet 100 and 101, he addresses her directly throughout both poems in a manner that suggests she let him down by being "forgetful" and "truant." He pleads and argues with her in these two sonnets, but eventually finds her poverty-stricken in Sonnet 103 and ceases to refer to

the failing inspiration of his Muse.

Johnson notes this ineffectiveness of the Muse. The Renaissance poet has "the traditional attitude of complaint ...in his complaint of the ineffectiveness of his Muse, who inspires him to inconsequential love songs when he would be writing more ambitious and more artistic poetry" (87). Ovid's influence is again evident here, but the muse, rather than Cupid, assumes blame for not inspiring toward great works.

If Ovid's influence is persistent in describing a rationale for writing love poetry, what of Virgil's influence when writing epics? How were the English influenced by the other prominent Latin figure? They do occasionally call on the Muses for help in the intellectual process of creating, but do not follow Virgil's plea to provide specific information. What remains a prominent influence from Virgil is the ordering of creative works. As Gregory states:

It was an historical fact that Virgil's works, Bucolics, Georgics, and Aeneid had progressed from a lowly or pastoral style through an intermediate phase to the loftiness of epic; and this fact during the Middle Ages had been elaborated into an all-inclusive wheel, the 'rota vergilii', that governed everything from the order in which the poet took up his work down to the smallest details he included. (Milton.79)

Gregory draws attention to the opening lines of The Faerie Queene: "Lo, I the man, whose Muse whilome maske,
/ As time her taught, in lowly Sphepheardes weeds..." as an intention to follow the "rota Vergilii." Spenser is the English Virgil before Milton took the role of English epic writer. Besides Bucolics and Georgics, the shepherd image is reminiscent of Hesiod. The pastoral style represents a stage of development and the image of Hesiod as the shepherd poet could have further undermined his popularity when Homer is rediscovered and Virgil is considered the ideal. The mature developed work under these guidelines requires a hero of a nation, even if the hero in Spenser's case is an armored queen.

But is the Muse in The Faerie Queene related to the nine mentioned in Hesiod and Plato? Considerable debate arose fifty to sixty years ago as to the identity of this muse of Spenser's. Whether she is Clio, the muse of history, or Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, is still being debated, as outlined by Gregory's article on the subject.

Whether they employ muses to ornament poetry, as in Spenser, or to describe a contemplative state, as in Shakespeare, Renaissance poets use "muse" in a confusing array of situations. As in Spenser's Amoretti, Shakespeare's muse in his sonnets can be the beloved. And like Sidney, Shakespeare indicates his "tenth Muse, ten times more in

worth / Than those old nine which rhymers invoke"
 (Sonnet 38.9-10). Shakespeare's muse can be male or female,
 a wife, or a truant inspirer. Donne, likewise, finds many
 ways to accommodate the word.

Donne uses "muse" in a reproductive sense to eulogize
 Elizabeth Drury in "The Second Anniversary of the Progres
 of the Soule."

Immortal maid, who though wouldst refuse
 The name of mother, be unto my Muse
 A father, since her chaste ambition is
 Yearly to bring forth a child as this.
 (Johnson.87)

The death of a young woman provides inspiration, and
 therefore a sort of seed for producing poetry. A muse can
 be any person or situation that stimulates poetry in
 Renaissance England. And, although Johnson documents he
 utilizes the word seventeen times (87), Donne also reacts
 to the overuse of muses when he writes in "Love's Growth,"
 "Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use / To say,
 which have no Mistresse but their Muse" (11-12).

Donne assures us with vividly detailed descriptions
 that he has a human mistress. Although Shakespeare is
 detailed in describing what his mistress is not (Sonnet
 130), Donne takes this to crude realism in describing his
 beloved's pimples as "Like spermatique issue of ripe
 menstrous boiles," in "The Comparison" (8). Donne makes

full use of conventions while reacting against them. He claims to be "Love's martyr" (Funerall 19), but as Johnson states is not married to his Muse (87).

In contrast with Shakespeare and Donne, Jonson returns to the ornamentality of Spenser. In "An Ode to Himself," Jonson presents his classical knowledge to the public by stating :

Are all the Aonian springs
Dried up? Lies Thespia waste?
Doth Clarius' harp want strings,
That not a nymph now sings? (7-10)

This complaint is strongly reminiscent of Spenser's Tears of the Muses bemoaning the state of the arts while showing off his education, but also one wonders, after reading Shakespeare and Donne, if the Helicon spring has gone dry for English poets. But Jonson claims to be a priest of the Muses in his "Epistle to Katharine Lady Aubigny," where he announces: "Hear what the Muses sing about thy root / By me their priest (if they can ought divine)" (100-102). There is doubt and questioning here, but little discussion with his muse, as in Shakespeare, and no direct substitution, as in works by Sidney, Donne, and Shakespeare.

The Muses are equally ineffective as divine inspirers for at least one English Renaissance poet

considered "inspired"--Marlowe. In Hero and Leander, Marlowe calls his muse "slack" (1.72) and is more concerned with "the Muse's sons" (1.476). Marlowe also presents the verb form when Hero looks out and "mused he did not come" (2.23).

Clark Hulse claims: "The Renaissance had its own way of talking about the self-creative poem: it is the voice of the muse, or of the god" (95). But I do not find the voice of the Muses during the English Renaissance. If there is a dependent belief on a deity providing inspiration, it is from Cupid, not the Muses. The Muse becomes increasingly the poet's own voice, not a divine inspiration. The spiritual voice of poetic creativity descends from Apollo's clear beams of intellectual insight and study, or Cupid's arrows acting through the beloved. But ultimately, the English Renaissance poet is his own muse.

Because the Muses became an internal reflection and were so often said to be ineffective, Milton's ability in reviving one of them with new protestant furor and religiosity in Paradise Lost is amazing. By bringing Urania out of the heavens to guide and inspire him, Milton revives the Muses as inspirational agents.

Gregory thoroughly documents Milton's relationship with the Muses, showing how Milton's education and belief in inspiration helped him create new material by "simultaneously transmitting and questioning

tradition" (frontpiece). Milton's inherited tradition includes Homer and Hesiod, Virgil and Dante. In his lines retelling the Old Testament version of creation, Milton incorporates references to the Greek, Latin, and Italian writers.

Although Milton is most often compared to Virgil, Dante, and Spenser, there are many Hesiodic parallels in Paradise Lost. Like Hesiod's Theogony, Milton tells the story of creation, not his personal or a hero's salvation. Like Hesiod in Work and Days, Milton attempts to explain why there is evil in the world and uses Eve in a way similar to Hesiod's Pandora. Like Hesiod's Zeus, Milton's God is a present force who bestows both blessings and curses. Milton tells England's version of Theogony and The Work and Days. Milton and Hesiod provide moral lessons drawn from their prospective cultural mythologies.

More specifically, unlike his Hebrew source, Milton's story of creation, like Hesiod's, begins with Chaos. Compare "In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth / Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill" (PL.36) to

First of all there came Chaos,
and after him came Gaia of the broad breast,
to be the unshakable foundation
of all the immortals who keep crests
of snowy Olympus." (Th.130)

Unlike "Genesis," Milton's creator does not begin by bringing light into darkness, but follows a Hesiodic pattern.

This creator also provides Milton with a Muse who is "heavenly," and connected with holy mountains: "Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top / Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire / That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed" (I. 6-8). How similar is this shepherd to Hesiod?

And it was they who once taught Hesiod
his splendid singing
As he was shepherding his lambs
on holy Helikon (22-3)

Milton's "chosen Seed" is the Hebrew text, but he appears to have had some Hesiodic influences in his classical education. Charles Grosvenor Osgood (57) and Gregory comment on Milton's Hesiodic influences, but this area of Miltonic scholarship remains rather undeveloped. Gregory thinks Milton probably knew of Hesiod's theogonical Muses (28), and I find many of the passages most Hesiodic are those next to references about the Muses. For instance, "Say, Muse their names then known, who first, who last..." (PL.1. 376) is similar to "tell me all this, you Muses... and tell who was first..." (Th. 114-5). It seems likely,

as Gregory suggests, that Milton referred to sources which included Hesiodic citations when looking for information on the Muses (28).

Virgil asks the Muses "the reason" (Aen.I.14) for the God's punishments and to "remember and retell" (Aen.7.851) the stories of national heroes. Milton, like Hesiod, asks for direct inspiration from the beings on holy mountains. In contrast, Gregory credits Hesiod with the most complete depiction of "conveying the poet's sense that his work originates outside himself and is not his to claim" (2).

Milton returns the theology to epic in Paradise Lost which had been missing for twelve centuries. Like Homer, Virgil and Spenser focus their epics on national fervor, rather than theological belief. A case for religious furor could be made for Dante, of course, but in The Divine Comedy, Virgil is the spiritual guide, not a muse from heaven. Milton did not ask Spenser to take him on a journey to deathly realms. Milton retold the stories of Moses and Hesiod with a protestant slant.

Oftentimes, Milton's classical references are mixed among several poets.

I sung of Chaos and Eternal Night,
 Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
 The dark descent, and up to reascend,

Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
 Clear Spring, or shady Grove, or Sunny Hill,
 Thee Sion and the flow'ry Brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallow'd feet, and warbling flow,
 Nightly I visit:... (III.18-32)

Hesiod's Chaos and Night, and the Muses bathing is combined with Dante's journey.

But Milton's Urania does not breath a voice into him or tell him exactly what to say, like Hesiod's nine sisters of poetic inspiration. She provides "nightly visitation unimplor'd / And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires / Easy my unpremeditated Verse" (IX. 21-24). She provides the inspiration; an inspiration filled with Christian illumination. The use of dreams is reminiscent of Chaucer's The Book of the Duchess and House of Fame. Milton's choice of Urania as the Christian Muse, instead of Calliope or Clio, who bear more pagan associations, is fully explained in Gregory's book (194-124).

Milton claims his illuminations are from God and assures his readers of Urania's connections:

Descend from Heaven, Urania, by that name
 If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine
 Following, above the Olympian hill I soar,
 Above the flight of Pegasean wing.
 The meaning, not the name, I call; for thou
 Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
 Of old Olympus dwell'st, but, heaven-born,
 Before the hills appeared or fountain flowed,
 Thou with eternal wisdom didst converse,
 Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
 In presence of Almighty Father, pleased
 With thy celestial song. (VII.1-11)

Divine inspiration, truth, and song are again brought together as it was in the beginning.



Figure 5. Engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael. "Touched by the celestial music of the spheres, Urania has closed her book and appears to be seized with an ecstatic rapture, whereas Clio, bound to the earth, records the deeds to be remembered." (From a private collection)

Fig. 5. from E. R. Gregory, Milton and the Muses.
(Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1989) 116.

Notes

¹ For a relating of this tale, see Evelyn G. White "The Contest of Homer and Hesiod." 565-598. For a discussion about the contest, see Lambertson 5-8.

² Although relying heavily on ancient texts, Stone and Eisler do not include Theogony in their works attempting to prove a matrifocal Neolithic time. Stone relies on Babylonian and Hebrew texts. Eisler mentions Hesiod's Work and Days, but concentrates primarily on Aeschylus' Oresteia to advance her theories. Theogony is more directly a telling of the shift in belief from earth-Gaia worship to Zeus taking over as head god.

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Vita

Kathleen Potthoff McHugh was born in to American parents in . She grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. She attended the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, and received a B.S. in Secondary Education with a major in English from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She taught English in junior high school and facilitated groups for a substance abuse program. Along with her family physician husband, she lived with the U.S. Navy for two years in Scotland and three years in Naples, Italy. She currently resides in Jacksonville, Florida with her husband and two daughters.

Kathleen imagined herself a future writer from the age of nine, when she wrote a story about a pet owl named Luey. Always an avid reader, Kathleen hopes acquiring a master's degree will turn the woman who reads into a scholar. She plans to teach and continue a lifetime of seeking knowledge.