CHAPTER ONE

The Mythology of the Muses

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In Greek mythology, the Muses are deities of poetry, song, music, and dance who preside over the realm of *mousikē*, the origin of our word "music," to which they give their name. Many cultures have believed in the divine origin of poetry and song, but these goddesses seem to have been a peculiarly Greek invention. In origin they appear to have been nature deities of the same stock as the nymphs, like the *Charites* (Graces) and the *Hōrai* (Seasons) with whom they are often linked (see LeVen in this volume). Such female pluralities are a typical feature of Greek religious belief which peoples nature with gods. But the Muses' specialization in song also reflects the centrality of choral music and dancing in the culture of early Greece (see Weiss in this volume). In the divine world they form the archetypal chorus, singing and dancing for the pleasure of the gods, often with Apollo as their leader (see Rutherford in this volume); in the human world they inspire poets and bestow on mortals the divine gift of song.

Poets from Homer onward invoked the Muses, either singly or as a group, and depicted themselves in elaborate imagery as servants, priests, or prophets of the goddesses, but the Muses were far more than deities of poetry: in the oral culture of early Greece, in which all ideas, whether religious, political, moral, or social, were expressed through the medium of song, they effectively encompassed all human wisdom, and their presence was ubiquitous (Herington 1985, 58–76). Yet they remain somewhat enigmatic figures. Although they are goddesses with the essential attributes of divinity, including immortality, anthropomorphism, and power (Henrichs 2010), there is nevertheless something abstract or at least indefinite about them. As E.R. Curtius long ago pointed out, unlike the other Olympians, they have "no well-marked personalities" (1953, 229) and they appear in different guises in different authors. Something of this flexibility can be seen in the range of relationships that poets can have with a Muse, which goes far beyond that of other deities, and also in the practice of invocation, one of our prime sources of evidence for their existence (Murray 2014, 21–7). Homer's Muses are nameless and oscillate between singular and plural, apparently with indifference, their "uncanny

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ability" to do so at its most stark in the final book of the *Odyssey* where they lead the *thrēnos* at Achilles' funeral, "both as a chorus of nine and in the seemingly abstract singular" (Porter 2013, 9 on *Od.* 24.60–3). This lack of fixity in relation to both their number and their names is evident throughout the Archaic and Classical periods and, despite the canonical status of Hesiod's version of their story, discussed below, conflicting traditions about them continued well into Roman times (Mojsik 2011).

Whatever their number, the original multiplicity of the Muses must stem in part from their functioning as a chorus, and the anonymity that characterizes many of their early appearances is also typical of female collectives whose identity is defined through membership of the group rather than at the level of the individual (Calame 1997, 30–3; Mojsik 2008, 60–71; Christian 2014,104). But another aspect that contributes to their fluidity is their unusually close identification with their product (Halliwell 2011, 58): from the start the Muses are not only inspirers and performers of poetry but, through metonymy, can stand for song itself. The Muse is thus simultaneously the external source of inspiration and "the divine embodiment of the music itself as performed" (Hardie 2009, 36). Hence, the presentation varies, with the Muses taking on the characteristics of the types of poetry in which they appear. Thus, for example, they tend to be sexless and impersonal in epic; in sympotic poetry their gifts are closely associated with Dionysus and Aphrodite, whereas in epinician poetry their immortalizing function is frequently evoked. References to the Muses in tragedy associate them with mourning (Lada-Richards 2002), in comedy with celebration and festivity (Calame 2004). In other words, the Muses can take on the coloring of their surroundings as if they have no fixed identities of their own. This metapoetic function is one that they retain throughout the ages (Schlapbach 2014, 33–4) and is no doubt one reason why the image of the Muses survived long after the religious belief system in which they originated had disappeared (Murray 2015).

To speak of their metapoetic function, however, is not to imply that they are merely a literary invention. If confirmation were needed of that fact, their depiction on vase-paintings, where they sing and play in the company of gods and poets, shows that they were part of the shared reality of Greek culture (Harriott 1969, 25–33; Queyrel 1992; Bundrick 2005, 49–102). Evidence for cult worship of the Muses proliferates from the fifth century BC onward, particularly in connection with the rôle of *mousikē* in education and the subsequent burgeoning of cults of poets and intellectuals (Zanker 1995; Clay 2004; Hardie 2018). But in the earlier period the situation is obscure. Given their nymph-like qualities and localized epithets (*Olympiades*, *Helikoniades*, *Pierides*, and so on), local cults of the Muses have generally been assumed to be ancient and widespread. But whether there is material evidence to support this view is a matter of dispute (Caruso 2016; Mojsik 2019). Most of our information derives from sources that are comparatively late, notably Pausanias and Plutarch, and it is often difficult to distinguish between genuine tradition and learned theorizing (Hardie 2006). So, whilst they emerge from a background of belief that is typical of early Greek religious thought, it may well be that it is only when Muses are differentiated from nymphs as a specific group and have a clearly defined social function that their cult worship is given a clear focus. Such a view would be supported by the parallel development in iconography, where Muses are generally indistinguishable from other groups of female figures in the early period (except on the rare occasions when they are identified by inscriptions), and only attain a definitive visual identity in the Classical era (Bundrick 2005, 51–60). But whatever their religious status, there can be no doubt that the Muses were firmly embedded in the Greek mythical imagination, and their very existence testifies to the importance of their art, both as a collective activity, and as a channel of communication between human and divine. Their image and function change, of course,

over time, but many of the themes that recur in their history can be found in the earliest Greek poetic texts that established their Panhellenic status, and that served as models for the subsequent representation of human musical activities in antiquity and beyond (Christian, Guest, and Wedepohl 2014).

Harmony, Pleasure, and Power

The first time we see the Muses in Greek literature they are singing at the feast of the gods that restores harmony on Olympus after the quarrel between Hera and Thetis over the fate of mortals in the first book of the *Iliad*. Unquenchable laughter shakes the gods as Hephaestus bustles about the palace pouring nectar into their cups, and they feast all day until the setting of the sun whilst Apollo plays his lyre and the Muses sing, responding with beautiful voice (*Il.* 1.595–604). In marked contrast to the situation on earth where the devastating consequences of the bitter dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon are about to unfold, peace reigns on Olympus as the gods indulge themselves with feasting, music and song. This typical scene of divine pleasure is further elaborated in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (182–206, with Richardson 2010), where Apollo joins the gods on Olympus, and all devote themselves to the music of the lyre and song. As he plays his lyre in their midst, stepping fine and high, radiance shining from his sparkling tunic and twinkling feet, the Muses sing all together, responding with beautiful voice (*opi kalēi*, 189, the same phrase as at *Il.* 1.604) whilst the Graces and the Seasons, Harmonia, Hebe, and Aphrodite dance, holding each other by the wrist. Zeus and Leto are filled with joy as they look on, their pleasure mirroring that of the imagined human spectator at the Delian festival, described earlier in the *Hymn* (146–64), to whom the participants seem like "unaging immortals" (151) as they sing and dance for the god. Above all he wonders at the beauty and skill of the Delian Maidens, the human counterpart of the divine chorus of Muses, who can sing songs to charm the hearts of mortals, bringing to life the men and women of old, and mimicking the voices of all. For gods and human beings alike, music is a source of pleasure, but, as always, we are reminded of the crucial divide between the two when the Muses sing of the helplessness of human beings and their inability to find a remedy against old age and death (190–3). The implied contrast between the two modes of existence at the end of *Iliad* is made explicit in the Muses' song, for whilst humans may seem like gods in the moment of performance, in reality their enjoyment is short-lived, doomed as they are to suffering and death.

These archetypal scenes foreground the beauty of the Muses' voices and the appeal of music to the senses, an idea which is also prominent in the proem to Hesiod's *Theogony*, the fullest and most vivid description we have of *mousikē* in action, and the foundational text in their mythology (Clay 2003, 50–72). Hesiod prefaces this poem on the origin and genealogies of the gods with a great hymn to the goddesses who inspire it, the Muses who dwell on mount Helicon (1–103, with West 1966). The sheer pleasure in musical activity and its physical sensations is one of the great themes of this opening passage in which the Muses delight the mind of their father, Zeus, and the other gods with the loveliness of their singing, as they process to Olympus, the black earth resounding beneath their dancing feet. Sonic effects are much to the fore (lines 39–43) as they harmonize their sound, and their "tireless voice flows sweet from their mouths" (Most 2006, 5) "lily-like" (*leirioessēi*) and "deathless" (*ambroton*). Hesiod depicts them as nymph-like creatures, at one with nature as they dance on Helicon and bathe in its holy springs, and their affinity with nymphs has often been stressed: they are virginal,

they delight in solitary places and they are typically associated with mountains, caves, and pastoral landscapes near springs and sources of water, the fundamental habitat of the nymphs (Larson 2001 and 2007). The floral attributes which they carry in early iconography also suggest a connection with the natural world, which they share with the many other female pluralities that feature so prominently in the mythical imagination. Originating from this same general group, the Muses can be seen as the divine prototype of the choruses of young girls found everywhere in early Greece, and their dancing provides the model for that of human beings (Calame 1997).

Whether human or divine, the female chorus operates as a unity. The chorus of Muses, although plural, sings with one voice (*opi kalēi*, in the singular, as above). Hesiod's Muses are a group of nine (*Theog.* 60, 77–9, 916–17), yet what is emphasized about them is their "like-mindedness" (60) and the concordance of their voices (39). Like many other female collectives, they are envisaged as a group whose qualities and attributes are interchangeable, even though Hesiod gives them individual names and is, apparently, the first to do so: Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polymnia, Urania and Calliope (77–9). These names are instructive since they are all "speaking names," that is, they all have a meaning, which can be roughly translated as Celebrating, Delighting, Festive, Singing, Dance-delight, Lovely, Many Hymning, Heavenly, Beautiful Voice. The names in themselves derive from words and phrases describing the Muses' activities in the previous verses. So, Clio picks up on *kleiousin* (67) where they "celebrate" the good ways of the immortals, Euterpe on *terpousi* (37 and 51) where they "delight" the mind of their father, Thalia on *en thaliēis* (65) referring to the "festivities" which are the characteristic setting for their choruses. The name Singing looks back to *melpontai* (66) where they "sing," Dance-delight to *choroi* (63) and *chorous* (7), both of which describe their "dancing," Lovely to *eratēn* (65), *epēraton* (67) and *eratos* (70), which suggest the erotic "loveliness" of the sound of their voices and their dancing feet. Similarly, Polymnia is anticipated by *hymneusais* (70) and *hymneusai* (11 and 37) and their "hymning," Urania by *ouranōi* (71) and Zeus' reign "in heaven," Calliope by *opi kalēi* (68) where the Muses exult in their "beautiful voice." This granting of names is almost an act of creation in itself, for as Thalmann has observed, the transformation of verbs, nouns, and adjectives into proper names virtually summons the goddesses into existence through language, so that "song turns into the divinities who are its patrons" (1984, 138). Each name could be said to personify an aspect of poetry and song that came into being with the Muses' birth (Murray 2005), but they are not used to define the goddesses as individuals. Indeed, some are not exclusive to Muses, and the names Thalia, Clio, Urania, and Erato are shared by Nereids, Charites, nymphs, and maenads (Mojsik 2011, 59–60). In later times individual Muses were given specific functions (Murray 2004; Hardie 2009), but for Hesiod the Muses exist as a plurality, as a chorus of like-minded sisters, one implying all the others, and their names represent the totality of musical experience that they embody. Order, harmony, beauty, and pleasure are the essential qualities of choral performance, and the Muses themselves epitomize that ideal.

The natural connection between the Muses and harmony is a constant motif in their history, given lyrical expression in Euripides' *Medea* when the chorus sings the praises of Athens, the land where "the nine Pierian Muses created golden-haired Harmonia" (830–2): harmony is an essential characteristic of their sisterhood, and harmony personified is the product of their unity. Similar ideas are at play in the mythological stories of the Muses' presence at weddings whose very purpose is to bring about the harmonious union between husband and wife. According to Pindar (*Pythian* 3.88–95) Peleus and Cadmus attained the highest

happiness known to man when the golden-crowned Muses sang at their weddings, the one to Thetis on Mount Pelion, the other to Harmonia in Thebes.[1] The wedding of Peleus and Thetis is also the setting for the earliest known depiction of the Muses in Greek art. On a black-figure *dinos* by Sophilos (*c.* 580–570 BC, see Bundrick in this volume) two groups of Muses are depicted in the wedding procession, one group of three accompanying the chariot of Apollo who plays his lyre, the other of five beside the chariot of Ares and Aphrodite, a juxtaposition which perhaps implies the idea of harmony, since Harmonia was their daughter (Hes. *Theog.* 933–7; Bundrick 2005, 52). Similarly, on the François Vase (*c.* 570 BC, see Bundrick in this volume), where all nine Muses are portrayed for the first time, and identified with inscriptions, the wedding of Peleus and Thetis provides the context for their appearance. These archetypal scenes, which recur in the classical tradition right through to the Renaissance (Christian 2014, 109–10) symbolize the idea that harmony, whether literal or metaphorical, is the gift that the Muses bring.

Another significant aspect of the Muses' mythology is their proximity to the most powerful god of all, Zeus. Indeed, their prime function in the *Theogony* is praise of Zeus, around whose altar they dance at the beginning of the poem (l. 4), and their attachment to him is repeatedly emphasized in the formulaic line that describes them as "Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus the aegis-bearer" (25, 52, 966, 1022). Already in Homer they are given the epithet "Olympian" (shared by no other deity apart from Zeus himself), and are depicted as daughters of Zeus (*Il.* 2.491). But that relationship is fundamental to the *Theogony*, which tells the story of Zeus' rise to power, from the origins of the world in primeval Chaos to the establishment of his supremacy as ruler of the Olympian gods. The poem, which the Muses inspire, mirrors the song of the Muses themselves who delight the mind of their father by singing of his victory over Cronus and the Titans, and celebrating the blessings of his rule (43–51). Just as Zeus imposed order on the world, allocating ordinances and domains to the gods, so his daughters exemplify that order in the harmony and unanimity of their singing, in marked contrast to the plethora of discordant voices threatened by Zeus' last enemy, Typhoeus (829–33; Stehle 1997, 205–6).

That theme of Zeus' supremacy and the triumph of musical harmony over violence and disorder is also central to Pindar's great first *Pythian Ode*, where music is not only aligned with the cosmic order of Zeus, but the means by which he imposes his will on the world. The golden lyre, instrument of Apollo and the Muses, has power over all who hear it, enchanting even Ares, the god of war, himself (1–12), whilst those hostile to Zeus are terrified at the sound of the Muses' cry, *boa* (13), a word with a wide semantic range covering, for example, the sound of pipes and lyres, the roaring of a crowd, the proclamation of a herald or a war cry (Morgan 2015, 314). Their song here becomes a weapon against which the hundred-headed monster Typhon (Hesiod's Typhoeus) can only rage in frustration as he sends forth fire and lava from his prison beneath Mount Etna (13–28), powerless to overturn the cosmic authority of Zeus. In this mythical image the true meaning of their epithet *Olympiades* is revealed, for though the Muses may be minor deities, and a female collective at that,[2] they are nevertheless at the heart of the Olympian pantheon, their song seen as an essential component in the stability of Zeus' world.

The Muses' affinity with Zeus is also attested in the story told by Pindar that, when he had imposed order on the world, Zeus asked the assembled gods if there was anything that they lacked. They replied that he should create for himself immortals who would "adorn" or "set in order" (*katakosmēsousi*) with words and music all the great deeds and institutions for which he was responsible (*Hymns* fr. 31).[3] The implication is that his *kosmos* is incomplete without the

singing of the Muses who are brought into being specifically to celebrate its beauty. The verb *katakosmein*, whose primary meaning is to "set in order," suggests more than simple adornment—perhaps even that the Muses' song confers a meaning on Zeus' orderly creation that it would otherwise lack (Pucci 1998, 31–3). At any rate, this myth gives music a necessary rôle in the constitution of the *kosmos* whose glory must be uttered in order for it to be complete. Walter Otto draws an interesting contrast between this and the situation in the Old Testament where the creation in itself expresses God's greatness. Whereas for the psalmist "The heavens declare the glory of God" (*Psalm* 19), the work of Zeus needs a voice to proclaim its existence, and the Muses are created to fulfill that purpose (Otto 1956, 28–9). This account of the Muses' origins is unique to Pindar, but their function is essentially the same as that described in Hesiod's *Theogony*: praise of Zeus and the cosmic order he has constructed.

Memory

The importance of the Muses in early Greek culture is evident from their close relationship with their father, Zeus, the king of the gods, but through their mother they are linked to an earlier generation of divine beings who preceded him. In accordance with the genealogical patterning that typifies his poem, Hesiod makes them the daughters of Mnemosyne, the personification of memory in its dual capacity of preserving the past and allowing the possibility of remembrance in the future (*Theog.* 53–5, 915–17). Mnemosyne is a Titan goddess, the daughter of the primordial deities Uranos (Sky) and Gaia (Earth), and thus one of the most ancient of divine powers. According to Pausanias (9.29.4), Mimnermus (fr. 13) knew of two generations of Muses, the elder the daughters of Uranos and Gaia, the younger the children of Zeus, whilst Alcman (fr. 2.ii.28) made the Muses the daughters of Gē (fr. 2.ii.28). The antiquity of the Muses is attested in these varying versions of their parentage, but it was Hesiod's richly symbolic genealogy that became the dominant one, reflecting an age-old connection between memory and song that has its origins in an oral culture. In a world without writing, memory is virtually the source of the poet's inspiration, since the bard must not only retain in his mind the oral diction out of which his poetry is made, but also create his song from it. At the most basic level, the bard cannot function without it. But memory also provides knowledge of the past that the Muses bestow, and guarantees that the fame of glorious deeds is not forgotten. Myth makes Mnemosyne the mother of the Muses because memory is at the heart of song, and Hesiod's genealogy embodies that relationship (Vernant 1965, I. 80–107; Simondon 1982, 103–27).

Mnemosyne does not feature in Homer, but the deep connection between memory and poetry is already apparent in the *Iliad*. So, for example, when the bard invokes the Muses before the catalogue of ships (*Il.* 2.484–93) he contrasts his own ignorance with the omniscience of the goddesses: he, being human, relies merely on hearsay, whereas they are ever-present witnesses of events who see, and therefore, know all things. He needs their aid because, whatever his prowess, he would never be able to name all the leaders and troops who came to Troy unless the Muses reminded him, the verb *mimnēskomai* at l.492 underlining the role of memory in the process. Pindar takes up and expands on this theme, explicitly invoking the Muses as daughters of Mnemosyne, who know all things (*Paean* 6.54–8) and asking them for help in his poetic task, since men's minds are blind without the wisdom they impart (*Paean* 7b.15–20). Here the Muses' memory relates not only to recollection of the past but to all knowledge that is hidden from mortal eyes. That knowledge can go back to a time before

human history, as we can see from the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* where Hermes delights Apollo with the sound of his newly invented lyre. He sings of the origins of the gods and how they received their portions, praising first and foremost Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses, who is his patron (4.427–33). Mnemosyne takes pride of place as the source of the young god's song, just as her daughters are celebrated in the proem to Hesiod's *Theogony* where they themselves sing of the birth of the gods "from the beginning" (*ex archēs*, l.45) and bestow their gift on the poet, so that he too can sing of their generation "from the beginning" (*ex archēs*, l.115). In both these theogonies, the past is seen not just as the antecedent of the present but also as the source from which it derives (Simondon 1982, 107).

The interdependence of the Muses and Mnemosyne is embodied in their genealogy, and perhaps also exists at the level of language. The etymology of the word *mousa* is disputed, but the majority of experts argue that it derives from the same root, **men-*, as *mimnēskomai* ("I call to mind," or "remember") and other related words to do with memory and thought in its various manifestations (e.g. West 2007, 31–5; Brillante 2009, 43–4). If this is correct it would underpin a deep-seated connection that is well attested in archaic and classical literature.[4] In fact, the link between memory and song, between time and poetry, remains close throughout Greek culture and beyond (Schlapbach 2014, 37–9). The Muses themselves are omniscient, and through their inspiration the poet is able to experience the past as if he too were present and thus to make it live for his audience. This making present is indeed a hallmark of the Muses' function, as we can see, for example, in the paradigmatic scene with Demodocus in book 8 of the *Odyssey* (486–91) where Odysseus says that it must have been a Muse or Apollo who taught him, so beautifully did he sing of the fate of the Achaeans, as if he himself had been present or had heard it from another witness of the events. Past and present come together in the moment of performance as all are transported to another world by the authenticity of the bard's account (Halliwell 2011, 77–88).

The recollecting and recording of the past is one aspect of the Muses' relationship to memory. But equally significant is their role in perpetuating remembrance for the future, as can be seen in the exceptional honor accorded to Achilles when the Muses led the mourning at his funeral (Hom. *Od.* 24.60–2, 93–4; Pind. *Isthm.* 8.56–62). The dirge that they sing ensures that his name will not die, that his *kleos* will live amongst men for ever in the epic poetry that celebrates his deeds. As grief is transmuted into song, the immortality that the Muses confer transcends the suffering and brevity of the hero's tragic life.

The immortalizing power of poetry is a favorite theme from Homer onward, but it is not confined to epic.[5] So, to take one of the best-known examples, Theognis (237–54) claims that he has given wings to his addressee, Cyrnus, so that he will fly over land and sea, his fame ever present on the lips of men as they sing of him at banquets and feasts. Even in death, his *kleos* will never die, for his name will be immortal thanks to the "glorious gifts of the violet-crowned Muses" (250). Conversely, Sappho (fr. 55) chides an uncultured woman (*apaideuton*) with the thought that when she dies there will be no memory (*mnamosuna*) of her since she has "no share in the roses of Pieria" (2–3). Instead she will wander to and fro, unseen, amongst the shadowy corpses in Hades, unremembered because of her ignorance of the Muses (Hardie 2005).

In a different context, Pindar (*Nem.* 1.12) proclaims that the Muse loves to commemorate (*memnasthai*) great contests, and it is Pindar again who brings out the significance of the Muses' genealogy for this *topos* when he pictures Mnemosyne as a mirror to noble deeds that would lie in obscurity unless celebrated in poetry's famous songs (*Nem.* 7.11–16). Fame and Mnemosyne are similarly brought together in a chorus of Euripides' *Hercules Furens* where

they sing of a life dedicated to the Muses, of Mnemosyne and of Heracles' glorious victories, which will be forever remembered in song (673–86).

In an oral culture, fame depends, of course, on musical performance, and in practice "immortality" is achieved when a song becomes part of the Panhellenic repertoire and travels through space and time. But beyond that merely practical consideration, we could say that in mythic thought the Muses, as daughters of Memory, counteract the effects of time by preserving for the future what belongs to the past. Through their gift, the subjects of song are elevated beyond a particular performance in the transient present to a more permanent realm where, together with the gods and heroes, they become part of the common cultural heritage (Thalmann 1984, 113–17; Herington 1985, 59–60).

Performance, Consolation, and Mortality

For the favored few there is the compensation of everlasting fame through poetry, but song brings consolation to ordinary mortals, too. Thus, Hesiod describes how a man whose heart is withered by recent bereavement forgets his cares as soon as he hears a bard singing of the famous deeds of men of old, or of the gods who dwell on Olympus, his anguish quickly turned aside by the goddesses' gifts (*Theog.* 98–103). When Memory lay with Zeus and gave birth to the Muses she brought forth "forgetfulness of evils" for mortals, a paradox that is emphasized by the word play on *Mnēmosynē* (Memory) and *lēsmosynē* (forgetfulness) in Hesiod's text (54–5). The idea of song as a solace for the ills of mortality is deep-seated in Greek culture, as is that of its quasi-magical power to enchant (*thelgein*) all those who hear it (Halliwell 2011, 45–55). Typical of the intensity of such experience is Apollo's reaction to the music of the newly invented lyre in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, where the loveliness of its sound invades his senses, and he is seized with longing as he listens to Hermes' wondrous singing (420–52 with Richardson 2010). The effects of music are vividly conveyed by this description, but whereas for gods it merely enhances an already care-free existence, for human beings it acts as an antidote against the inevitable miseries of death and decay, its value all the greater through its power to liberate the listener, at least momentarily, from the conditions of mortality. Plato later drew on these traditional ideas in his semi-mythical account of the origins of *paideia* in the *Laws* (2.653d–654a), when he says that the gods took pity on the human race, "born to suffer as it was," and gave them the Muses, with Apollo as their leader, and Dionysus, who taught them how to dance. Celebrating the religious festivals instituted in honor of these deities gives refreshment to care-worn mortals, restoring them to wholeness as they find solace from their labors in the choral worship of the gods, "their companions in the dance" (654a). Plato's formulation here suggests that it is above all through participation in musical performance that the presence of the gods is felt and the power of the Muses is experienced (Söffner 2014).

Greek myth portrays music as a gift of the gods, and the Muses are both the embodiment of music and the channel through which that gift is communicated to human beings. Hesiod's encounter with the goddesses on mount Helicon, the archetypal epiphany and the model for many such scenes of poetic initiation in antiquity,[6] singles him out from his fellow human beings, and authorizes him as a divine singer in traditional terms that are part of the belief system that made such epiphanies possible (Henrichs 2010, 32–5). But the relationship with the Muses does not end there, for the equally traditional practice of invocation implies their presence in every poetic performance, reminding us that music is above all a performative art (Cook 1998, 73–8) whose effectiveness depends on the participation of the goddesses in the

process. When the Thracian bard Thamyris met the Muses and enraged them by boasting that he could beat them in a contest, they put a stop to his singing, depriving him of his divine gift of song and making him forget his kitharist's ability (*Il.* 2.594–600).[7] This story can be read in a number of ways, most obviously as a classic tale of the punishment of human *hybris*, and it fits with other myths of the misuse of music, for example, that of Marsyas, flayed alive for challenging Apollo to a musical contest (Pl. *Euthyd.* 285c–d), or of Linus, who was killed by Apollo for rivaling him in song (Pausanias 9.29.6). But the image of the silenced Thamyris is also a potent reminder of what a world without Muses would be like.

In the oral society in which the Muses originate, music is the basis of culture and the means by which human beings can transcend their mortality, if only in the moment of performance, or, for the favored few, through the remembrance that song confers. In that context, to live without the Muses, as Stephen Halliwell has put it, is "to lack something essential to the most fulfilling kind of human existence" (2012, 17). As society changes, so too do the Muses: broadly speaking they move from being anthropomorphic goddesses to quasi-personifications of predominantly creative and intellectual practices, whilst always retaining their connection with poetic inspiration (Murray 2004). But though the scope and meaning of *mousikē* change over time, we can say that throughout antiquity the Muses were essential to a civilized and fully human life.

NOTES

1 See also Pind. *Nem.* 5.22–37; Thgn. 15–18; Eur. *IA* 1036–48; Diod. Sic. 5.49.1. On the theme of harmony in iconography and literature see Bundrick 2005, 140–96.
2 For discussion of issues of gender relating to the Muse see Murray 2006, Mojsik 2008.
3 For detailed analysis of this *Hymn*, which exists only in fragments, see Snell 1960, 71–89 and Hardie 2000.
4 Further references to Memory as mother of the Muses include Pind. *Isthm.* 6.75–6; Solon fr. 13.1–4; Terpander fr. 4 = *adesp.* 941 *PMG*; Alcm. fr. 8; Aristoph. *Lys.* 1249; Pl. *Euthyd.* 275c.
5 For a comprehensive discussion of all Archaic epic and lyric verses in which the Muses are mentioned see Semenzato 2017. On the Muses in different genres see Maslov 2016.
6 See e.g. Most 2006, xiii–xxiv; Platt 2011, 50–60; Murray 2014, 15–8 with further bibliography; Petridou 2015, chapter 4. On the *Dichterweihe* of Archilochus see Clay 2004.
7 Further discussion in Murray 2002, 36–8 and 2006, 337–40; Wilson 2009. On Thamyris in art, see Bundrick 2005, 126–31, and Sarti in this volume.

FURTHER READING

Semenzato 2017 is an indispensable resource, providing a detailed analysis of all passages in which Muses are mentioned in epic and lyric poetry from the eighth to fifth centuries BC. Camilloni 1998 is a useful general study of the Muses in antiquity, but there is nothing of this sort in English. Tomasz Mojsik's forthcoming book on the Muses in the Routledge *Gods and Heroes* series is therefore eagerly awaited. Harriott 1969 remains a good starting point on the Muses before Plato, and Thalmann 1984 is much to be recommended. Spentzou and Fowler 2002, and Murray and Wilson 2004 are collections of essays which cover a wide range of Muse-related themes, both with extensive bibliographies. Christian, Guest, and Wedepohl 2014 is a

particularly rich source on the Muses in European culture, which also sheds light on their rôle in antiquity. Caruso 2016 collects together and examines the evidence for Muse cults, whilst Mojsik 2019 discusses the controversy about how far back they go. Halliwell 2012 considers what the Muses stood for by looking at ideas of life without them.

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