

OF MEMORY AND MUSES: THE WELLSPRINGS OF CREATIVITY

by

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ABSTRACT

The nine mythological Muses have been defined as representations of poetic form and as external sources for the origins of stories. They have been condemned by scholars as passive feminine supporters of a patriarchal system, and they have been accused of providing a misleading explanation as to the origins of inspiration by suggesting that creativity is externally based. However, if the Muses are understood as representations of human creative processes, then their story becomes the story of all other stories as they come into being.

Through an exploration of the Muses' foundational mythology and their many forms throughout the generations, there is evidence that problematizes any simplistic or one-dimensional understanding of the Muses. Much of their meaning is embedded through implications (absences) and seems to function through the intricate relationship between the artist and the muse, a relationship that has been called a possession. An understanding of the Muse incorporates the interconnectedness that exists within the individual and between bodies of knowledge, as well as the unpredictability, uncertainty, and changeability of the very knowledge and inspiration offered by the nine goddesses.

INTRODUCTION: THE SONG OF THE MUSES

Words take root on the pages of a book. Motionless. Frozen. Like statues bound by marble halls, words have no power— no color— when they are buried in ink. They serve as hollow vessels, representing something else. A tombstone. A marker. *Here lies a story which must be remembered.* The book is a grave, an obituary, and the words are the ashes of a story that has been spent.

Of course, the words had power once. They held the song of a story, and they burned so brightly and so fiercely that a writer felt the flames and heard the song. Thus consumed by a certain kind of madness, the writer took the quill and carved the song in ink. Words were forged in the story's flames, and when they first touched the page, they burst against the shadowed canvas like sparks. But then it was done. The story was written and set aside. The madness faded. Left forgotten, the story died.

The worst fate for any book is to be forgotten— left unread. There is no story if the story is not heard, and the words are nothing more than hollow vessels if no one comes to reconstruct them. But it is possible— even after the story has faded— for someone to find it and rekindle the flame. Embers are reignited. The story is recreated through the imagination of the reader, and the ink that trapped the words in cryonic suspension begins to melt. The words come to life like Pygmalion's statue in the ancient myth. He fell in love with stone carved in the form of a woman, and Aphrodite gave the statue life after witnessing the artist's devotion. Just so, the reader brings life to the pages of a book, and the power returns to the words; they sing their story, and the story can take

root inside the imagination of the reader— taking new form like the phoenix that rises from the ashes of death.

In *Symbols of the Sacred*, Louis Dupré considers the weight of meaning— the process by which objects become symbols that transcend the superficiality of their expression. He writes:

The synthesis of the imagination requires a reconstruction of the original succession of sensations into a new temporality. . . . To reproduce a percept is to take it out of its original mode of given-ness and to place it in a temporal setting which essentially transforms it. What results is not merely a reproduction but, as Kant knew, a novel production. . . . Kant's emphasis on the *productive* (and not merely *reproductive*) character of the synthesis of the imagination led Fichte to conceive of the imagination as the moving power of the mind. (5).

Since ancient times, the muse has often represented the synthesis of imagination. She and her sisters have always walked the path between a thing that was old and the thing that could be reborn. Poets asked the Muses for guidance in the telling of their songs and stories, and the goddesses personified poetic forms as well as inspiration. They represented the first whispers of a story— the moment of epiphany when a new story was discovered or rebuilt. And they stood in the place between memory and imagination— emphasizing both production and reproduction. In *The Lives of the Muses*, Francine Prose writes:

“. . . the artist can never fully account for the alchemical process that turns anatomical knowledge and fresco technique into the Sistine Chapel. To create *anything* is to undergo the humbling and strange experience— like a mystical visitation or spirit possession— of making something and *not knowing where it comes from*. It's as if

the magician had no idea how the rabbit got into his hat.”
(2)

The myth of the Muses emerged as artists sought answers for the mysteries of the process— creative alchemy. As Prose explains, “The Greeks assumed that a deity had to be involved. Significantly, they picked goddesses— nine of them . . .” (2). These goddesses— conjured from the murkiness of an enigma— were believed to ignite and tend the imagination of artists, readers, and writers, encouraging the growth of a story. The Muses are both story-keepers and story-creators— providing both guidance (rules for reproduction) and inspiration (pathways to production). Thus, their nature could be described as paradoxical. The nine goddesses stand in the place between memory and creativity. They take the old and make it new again, but they work according to their own purposes. They are rarely seen unless they choose to be seen. The Muses are sometimes fickle and often unpredictable. They are known for their elusive nature, and Prose suggests that their elusiveness has contributed to their persistence in culture. She writes:

The Greeks . . . had the common sense to make these celestial sisters more abstract, private, and distant than their heavenly colleagues, with their juicy soap operas of betrayal, jealousy, mortal lover metamorphosed into animals and plants. Perhaps the Greeks intuited that the muses’ important elusive work was beyond the limited reach of anecdote and gossip. (2)

The mystery attributed to the goddesses underscores the nature of their work. Born of mystery, they live in mystery. And to a certain extent, that mystery ensures their survival. In *Stopping: A Mode of Animation*, Patricia Berry analyzes several variations of the Perseus myth in which the hero faces the monster Medusa. In one version, Perseus is

said to have approached the monster without a shield. He averts his gaze and uses his other senses to guide his hand. Berry writes, “Feeling— you *feel* the Medusa. You touch, sense her quality as mistress (her name means “the mistress”). Rather than reflection through distance, the image here is intimate, reflective sensitivity . . .” (85).

There is a distinction between the understanding provided by the eyes and the understanding provided by touch. In the case of Perseus, his eyes— the vision that typically provides knowledge to human beings— will lead him into doom. It may be the first instinct of human beings to “look” at what they seek, but the myth of Perseus implies that something (in some circumstances) may be lost by relying too quickly upon that primary sense. Berry writes:

But let us stop and focus on her: why doesn’t she want to be looked at directly? Could it be that to look *at* creates a distance that offends her, makes her an object, whereas I become removed, a spectator. To view her as an object creates this chasm between us, she and me, separating me from the depths of my own nature. As she becomes objectified, I become “unnatural” or denatured— that heroic posture we have come to call ego consciousness. (86)

Drawn to mystery, humanity will pluck at the strings of the unknown and seek answers to unravel the hidden things. Much can be learned from the desire to see, to dissect. But such intense examination may have damaging consequences on the thing studied. The hunt often ends with the death of the quarry. In *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov proclaims his love for butterflies. He spends hours seeking them, catching them. He revels in their beauty, and then he pins the object of his fascination to a board and kills the beauty that he loves. The act of studying— the act of looking— can transform the

beautiful butterfly (and the horrible Medusa) into an object that can be dissected. The author, in the effort to transform ideas into words, may pin them to the page like butterflies. Perhaps, it is for the sake of self-preservation that the Muses keep their visitations brief and mysterious before they flit beyond the reach of human sight and understanding once again. They linger in the moment when beauty first takes hold—in the first glimpse of the butterfly or the first brush of the word. They sing a song that conjures madness, and then when the madness fades, they flit from their hosts and slip into shadows, leaving the artist with hazy half-forgotten memories. The Muses are often felt and rarely seen, and their silence speaks as strongly as their singing voices.

Berry writes, “It has always seemed to me that myth isn’t so much stories about the development of history, civilization, and consciousness as it is images of things eternal, things that repeat, or perhaps have nothing to do with time at all . . .” (77). Her conclusions speak to the same transcendence that Dupré emphasizes in his book. Mythology may be studied as a thing of the past—a frozen unchanging object to be examined within the walls of a museum, but Berry suggests that myth is important not because it allows us to understand the past but because it points at the patterns that we may see in the present. And the Muses—who stand behind the stories that the poets tell—seem to reflect this same sentiment. As characters of myth who personify poetic forms, the Muses stand in the place between the past and the present. Memory and creativity. The story of the Muses is the story of other stories and of their coming into being. They are more than the nine names written in the old myths.

Yet, just like the books that they inspire, Muses are subject to the same vulnerabilities. When a muse is ignored, she loses her power. When her song isn't heard, it may fade like the words on a forgotten page. The Muses can be frozen too—locked on the one-dimensional plane where words are only placeholders. When meaning is restricted, possible forms of understanding may also be bound. Dupré writes:

An authentic symbol can never be pinned down to a one-to-one meaning as a discursive concept. Nor does the symbol ever relate to its referent by a single bond of purpose or causality. To define one event exhaustively as a clear anticipation of another . . . impoverishes the symbol. By the polyvalence of its symbols the imagination is able to surpass not only what is directly given but even what can be rationally expressed. (8)

Thus, the study of the Muses and inspiration is a delicate matter. If the mythological Muse possesses the ability to explain things eternal, as Berry suggests, it is imperative that the muse is not confined to a one-dimensional meaning. She must be understood as something more than a one-to-one representation— a frozen object of a distant time. Instead, the Muses should be recognized as the fluid characters of living texts that have influenced (by the essence of their nature) multiple disciplines.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MYTHOLOGICAL MUSE

The old stories begin with an invocation. A plea to the Muses. An invitation for divine madness and possession. A poet begins the *Odyssey* with the cry: “Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story / of that man skilled in all ways of contending, / the wanderer . . .” (Homer, 1-3). The poet does not merely request the guidance of the Muses; he demands their presence in his mind and in his very soul. He could have asked the Muses to sing the story to him, but he begs them to sing in him instead, and his words express a desire to become the channel for the Muse-song so that he might convey that which seems to exist externally from himself. The story. The poem. The transcendent truth. The invocation might be interpreted as a prayer. Or a fanfare. It was a poetic tradition. A plea to memory. And a promise to honor the arts.

In the first book of the *Aenid*, Virgil writes, “O Muse! the causes and the crimes relate; / What goddess was provok'd, and whence her hate; / For what offense the Queen of Heav'n began / To persecute so brave, so just a man . . .” (1.11-14). Virgil's acknowledgment of the Muses is present, though less pronounced than in Homer's *Odyssey*. The acknowledgment serves the expectations of tradition, and there are many examples that echo such sentiments. Dante Alighieri— in Canto II of *The Inferno*— writes: “O Muses, O high genius, aid me now! / O memory that engraved the things I saw, / Here shall your worth be manifest to all!” Obviously, the tradition of invocation was not confined to the poets of ancient Greece. Milton calls to the Muse in *Paradise Lost*:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit / Of that
 forbidden tree, whose mortal taste / Brought death into the
 world, and all our woe / With loss of Eden, till one greater
 Man / Restore us, and regain the blissful seat / Sing
 Heavenly Muse; that on the secret top of Oreb, or of Sinai,
 didst inspire / That shepherd . . . (10)

Shakespeare also invoked the Muses. In *Henry V*, the chorus cries, “O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention / A kingdom for a stage, princes to act / And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!” (1.1-4). As a poetic tradition, the act of invoking the Muses has persisted for generations. On the surface, it does not appear to be an elaborate tradition. It only requires a “nod” of acknowledgement—a proclamation of the name, and that announces the beginning of a story much in the way of “once upon a time.” Such phrases mark the place of beginnings like the lift of a conductor’s hands before the invitation of the first note of a symphony. Such words are like the breath taken before the start of the story, and they give the writer, the poet, or the singer a solid place to which they can anchor their unfolding words.

Thus, the invocations may seem to serve a simple purpose in literature. They are a flicker in the opening sequence of a story, and then they fade behind the more glamorous accounts of gods and mortals. The Greek epics often include images of powerful pantheon gods who dwell on Mount Olympus. Zeus. Poseidon. Athena. Hera. Apollo. Ares. Aphrodite. The list is long, and many of the gods play a direct role in the lives of mortals. Their actions are well-documented and vividly described in tomes like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. They choose heroes and fight alongside their chosen mortals. They argue. They give their council. Yet, for all the brevity of the invocations, the Muses are often the first immortals acknowledged in various Greek poems. And then

they appear to vanish in the manner common to their elusive nature. They are always acknowledged but rarely involved in the direct events of a story. Yet, the invocation marks their presence in a way that underlines their absence. In this sense, they are projected beyond the boundary of the stories. They exist behind the words— unfettered and free to flit away into shadow. And the mystery that their absence creates seems to add to their living appeal. In *The Orphic Voice*, Elizabeth Sewell suggests that: “Tradition is not a handing down of dead fixities, but an invitation to further development . . .” (22).

By requesting the Muses’ favor at the beginning of a poem, the writer creates a dedication to the nine goddesses who preside over the arts. According to their own mythology, the Muses are integral to the process of storytelling, though their personas rarely take form *within* the story itself. Instead, it is their prerogative to sing through the poet, offering their voices. Shaping the stories. Rekindling the memories. As figures who work in the mechanisms of storytelling, the Muses are often difficult to separate from the stories that they tell. But there have been some accounts of their physical embodiment within myth, in which they play the role of characters. These brief passages offer some insight into the literary nature of the Muses as forged in the flames of mythology, and the substance of their nature— complex and mysterious— sheds light upon their archetypal, symbolic role.

That role, however, is not always easy to define. For instance, even the names and numbers of the Muses have not always remained constant in mythology or

interpretation of mythology. In *Muses: Revealing the Nature of Inspiration*, Julia Forster writes:

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, when they [the Muses] first came into being, what a muse means has never been agreed upon. Writers and thinkers from that era disagreed even then on their provenance, their number, their names and which gods brought them into being. (loc 104)

In some accounts, there were only three goddesses presiding over the arts and artists. In *Descriptions of Greece* written by Pausanias, the three mountain goddesses were identified by the sons of Aloeus. They were named Melete (study or practice), Mneme (memory), and Aoide (song). Such names signified the memory that works behind art, the study of art, and the performance of art. They were set as guardians before the gateway of artistic expression, representing everything that could be faced by an artist undertaking that challenge. By pleasing the Muses and gaining passage through their gateways, the poet can achieve success in any storytelling endeavor (or so speaks the mythology).

In later accounts, there were nine goddesses, and those goddesses became the more commonly known assembly of Muses. Though the descriptions vary slightly from story to story, each of the nine goddesses became associated with certain forms of art and particular objects. These Muses— according to common mythology— were born of a union between Zeus and Mnemosyne. Mnemosyne was the titan queen of memory. And Zeus (of course) was king of the gods and lord of skies. It is suggested that, for nine nights, Zeus went away with Mnemosyne to a place far from mortal concerns. The nine

Muses were conceived during those nine nights. Their birth is described by Hesiod in the

Theogony. He writes:

And when the time came, as the months passed away and the seasons turned about, and the long tale of days was completed, she [Mnemosyne] bore nine daughters— all of one mind, their carefree hearts set on song— not far from the topmost peak of snowy Olympus. There they have their gleaming dancing-places and their fair mansions; and the Graces and Desire dwell beside them, in feasting. Lovely is the sound they produce from their mouths as they sing and celebrate the ordinances and the good ways of all the immortals, making delightful utterance. (5)

The Muses were given the blessing of song. In their musical voices, they carried the ancient stories of glory and triumph, and they performed their songs for the gods in the halls of Olympus. It was their duty to play homage to the memory of battles fought and victories achieved. They did this among their kin and before their father Zeus, but in addition, they carried the stories down to earth and chose mortal vessels through which they could spread the glory of the gods on human planes.

Hesiod— according to his own work— was one of the chosen mortals. The Muses came to him with song and entrusted the account of the gods to his voice.

According to his account, the Muses told him to share the divine stories with other mortals. Hesiod describes the encounter in the *Theogony*, writing:

From the Muses of Helicon let us begin our singing, that haunt Helicon's great and holy mountain, and dance on their soft feet round the violet-dark spring and the altar of the mighty son of Kronos. And when they have bathed their gentle skin in Permessos, or the Horse's fountain, or holy Olmeios, then on the highest slope of Helicon they make their dances, fair and lovely, stepping lively in time. From there they go forth, veiled in thick mist, and walk by night, uttering beautiful voice, singing

of Zeus who bears the aegis . . . (3)

As a shepherd, Hesiod tended to the sheep at the foot of Mount Helicon where the Muses made their home. As the passage explains, Hesiod was at work one night when he heard the Muses singing. They came to him in that hour, teaching him “fine singing, as he / tended his lambs below holy Helicon” (3). And as the goddesses— gatekeepers— of art and song, they provided Hesiod with the divine right to offer his account. They provided him with an authority to speak on matters of Olympus. The *Theogony* contains an explanation of the gods— a creation story beginning with Earth and Heaven that tracks the resulting power struggles and unions among the gods. As for the Muses, they are given names within the Theogony and a description of their art, and while their role in the story is less extensive than that given to the other gods, Hesiod still lingers longer with the Muses than the poets who move away from them once the invocation is spoken.

Calliope is called the chief among the Muses. Her particular realm is the form of epic poetry. Her sisters are Clio (history), Erato (Erotic poetry), Euterpe (music and lyric poetry), Melpomene (tragedy), Polyhmnia (sacred lyrics, rhetoric, geometry), Terpsichore (dance), Thalia (comedy and bucolic poetry), and Urania (astronomy and astrology). Each Muse claims a particular object(s) that represents her essence and poetic realm. Thus, they are given names as separate entities, but according to Hesiod, they function as one mind. They are sisters who are fundamentally linked, and when the poets call upon them, they usually beseech the kindness of every muse— not just one or two. The Muses are bound by the music and the stories that burden them. They are separate impressions that are also part of the whole— like pages of the same book fused together.

Similarly, while the Muses ruled over separate art forms, those forms are fundamentally linked by the innate one-ness of the rulers.

Though the poets of ancient Greece often made their appeals to the Muses, they were not alone in their plight. Scholars and philosophers also turned to the Muses in the pursuit of understanding. According to *Muses* by Julia Forster, Plato built a temple to honor the nine goddesses and held many of his seminars there (23). He valued the influence of inspiration— possession by the Muses— and claimed that art was hollow without the force of inspiration to drive it. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes four kinds of madness, and the Muses play a significant role in that discussion. Plato writes:

The third kind is the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; which taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art— he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman. (886)

Plato suggests that it is possible for an artist to write without the influence of muse-driven inspiration, but such work— to Plato's mind— would be empty. Hollow and uninhabitable. The words would be present and perhaps possess style, but they could not contain the depth of power that the madman's work could hold. Possession is a necessity for transcendent art, according to Plato. Without the mark of madness— the divine sight to look beyond the substance of what is readily understood— the artist speaks only from the superficial and the transient rather than the eternal.

Claiming madness or divine understanding can also become a sign of authority for both scholars and poets. As indicated by the passages cited earlier, Hesiod made the claim that the Muses *taught* him the art of fine singing. His account suggests that the Muses came to him in their corporeal forms and instructed him as to his duties as a poet— passing the story of the divine to his understanding. In other words, they seemed to play the role of teachers, and simultaneously gave Hesiod the authority to tell stories about the happenings of Olympus. But Plato’s discussion of madness and his analysis of the mechanism of inspiration, emphasize a more direct and complex relationship between the Muses and their students.

Madness is internal. It anchors within the mind and within understanding. To be “inspired” is to be filled with the spirit. When Plato speaks of the Muses, he does not paint them as teachers. He explains the third kind of madness as one in which the individual is *possessed* by the Muses. By this line of understanding, the Muses sing *through* the poets. They possess the artists and take hold of their understanding until they speak with voices that are not their own. This is the path— according to Plato— by which the mortal lays claim to eternal matters. And by taking the Muses and bringing them into alignment with the consciousness of artists, Plato changes the manner by which they may be understood. They become something more than characters— teachers in a story. They become more than representations of poetic form because they also represent the cognitive processes that occur within the mind during creative endeavors. Plato brings the Muses down from Olympus and gives them roots within the psyche. They step away from the echoes of mythology and become physical representations of something

more abstract. The Muses themselves come closer to transcendence even as they guide mortals down that same path.

There is another story in the *Phaedrus* that concerns the Muses. Plato and his companion speak of the importance of pursuing knowledge— of pursuing the transcendent and immortal understanding— rather than dwell on simple, physical pleasures. Plato explains this pursuit in terms of a story that involves the influence of the Muses. He writes:

A lover of music like yourself ought surely to have heard the story of the grasshoppers, who are said to have been human beings in an age before the Muses. And when the Muses came and song appeared they were ravished with delight; and singing always, never thought of eating and drinking, until at last in their forgetfulness they died. And now they live again in the grasshoppers; and this is the return which the Muses make to them— they neither hunger, nor thirst, but from the hour of their birth are always singing, and never eating or drinking; and when they die they go and inform the Muses in heaven who honours them on earth. They win the love of Terpsichore for the dancers by their report of them; of Erato for the lovers, and of the other Muses for those who do them honour, according to the several ways of honouring them; — of Calliope the eldest Muse and of Urania who is next to her, for the philosophers, of whose music the grasshoppers make report to them; for these are the Muses who are chiefly concerned with heaven and thought, divine as well as human, and they have the sweetest utterance. (1125)

Some humans learned to love music more than life itself, and the Muses rewarded them with the opportunity to serve them after death by giving an account of mortals who served the arts and the Muses well. Thus, like the madmen who became filled with the Muses' influence, those humans who became grasshoppers achieved immortality for their

devotion to the arts. Possession and Pursuit. In the story of the grasshoppers, immortality— transcendence— becomes an important element, just as it plays an important role in the discussion of madness. The grasshoppers choose to pursue something beyond the baser needs of their flesh— music. And for that devotion, they were rewarded with an eternal connection to the arts.

In that same vein of myth regarding Muses, mortals, and music, the story of Orpheus stands in the gap between mortality and the divine in much the same way as the grasshoppers described in Plato’s account. Orpheus— according to his story— was a poet (born of a Muse) whose voice possessed the power and beauty to influence both living and non-living things. After the death of his wife Eurydice, Orpheus uses his poetic gifts to gain entrance into the Underworld. He earns the opportunity to bring his wife back to the mortal planes, and he guides her to the very edge of the Underworld with his music before temptation overcomes his will. He looks at his wife before she takes her leave of the land of the dead, and Orpheus loses her in that moment. His misfortune speaks to the dangers of looking— the same dangers described by Patricia Berry in her article *Stopping: A Mode of Animation*. When Orpheus turns to look so closely at the prize of his work, that very prize seems to slip through his fingers. The poet, though he possesses a divinely inspired gift, walks along a fragile plane suspended between mortal understanding and divine transcendence. When he seeks the transcendence too quickly or too fiercely, the understanding flits beyond his reach. Lost to him. Berry writes:

“The Medusa can get any of us when we see nature (her nature, my nature) as an objective fact detached from, out of touch with, the inner sensate touch of life. But Perseus finds a way, in that version of the tale I have preferred,

through touch. By touching the Medusa's body he traces its stasis, the outlines of its fixity, without distancing himself from it. He acknowledges that nature is as she is, simply there, but he keeps his hands on her and knows her body through his fingertips. He is intimate, concrete, near, abandoning the eye's direct perception of looking at, which makes for distance." (87)

Orpheus, son of the Muses, could be accused of looking too closely. For all his talent, he grows too confident and turns too quickly— seeking the reassurance of his gaze. And the power granted to him through music seems to crumble. Orpheus' story attests once again to the elusive nature of the Muses. That elusiveness seems to color everything they touch— every gift that they bestow. They demand to be felt and trusted. Not seen.

By becoming more active within the process of mortal creativity, the Muses become closer to mortality than the goddesses who perform in the halls of Olympus as painted in the myths themselves. Instead, the Muses become something more than the characters of a story as they become representatives of the creative process. In *The Orphic Voices*, Sewell writes:

Every poem and recounted myth and scientific hypothesis and theological statement and theory of politics or history and every philosophy become records of happenings at particular times, all of which, if they have any life in them at all, have the capacity to be taken further, in varying degrees, by other minds present and to come. (23)

In other words, the stories and words that possess any manner of transcendence can persist through their flexibility— their tendency to be adapted into new forms by new minds. Through this thinking, there is a shift from understanding the Muses as personifications of poetic forms to personifications of the creative mental processes. As

such, their role becomes more complex as they illustrate the intricacies of human cognitive mechanisms.

After he shares the story of the grasshoppers and their devotion to the arts, Plato makes a remark about the Muses and their innate nature. He describes them in relation to other deities, explaining, “for these are the Muses who are chiefly concerned with heaven and thought, divine as well as human, and they have the sweetest utterance” (1131). The Muses demonstrate a complex level of interconnectedness that exists within all things. Themselves. The arts. Mortality. Immortality. They represent the mechanisms of creativity as well as the pursuit of the eternal. They are fundamentally bound to matters of earth while simultaneously tethered to the divine. The philosophers of ancient Greece laid the foundation for the complexity of the muse as something more than the superficiality of a myth.

Dupré— in his examination of symbols and the construction of meaning— states that a symbol must hold many meanings. It should not be easily confined or explained, or it should have many possible explanations. To some degree, these explanations may seem contradictory due to the nature of the symbolic which is meant to be complex as it points to things eternal. While paraphrasing the work of Eliade in his *Methodological Remarks on the Study of Symbolism*, Dupré writes:

As all symbols, they are so *polyvalent* that no single rational interpretation can ever exhaust their meaning. In fact, the less specific a symbol is, the richer its symbolic meaning becomes. Eliade has noted that the various meanings of a symbol are not continuous with each other on the plane of immediate experience. Thus, the moon symbol reveals at once temporality, the female principle, death and resurrection. Even the existence of archetypal

structures in the infinite variety of symbolic meanings is dubious. Nature is infinite in its potential meanings and anything can symbolize. (8)

The Muses are figures of mythology, but their presence remains embedded in culture today. While they are characters on the page, they stand for concepts that extend beyond the superficially simple explanation of their attributes. And they persist even in absence. They rarely hold the spotlight within ancient poetry. After the invocation, they seem to fade. Yet, because of that invocation, the entire work becomes dedicated to their care, which makes them important to the entire process of the epic poetry, even though their names may not be breathed again. Thus, the Muses often hold court as an invisible presence. Important but unseen. Always working but barely acknowledged. The final effort of creativity— productivity— is often considered more important than the strange mechanisms that allow creative processes to produce results in the first place.

The realms of creativity and inspiration— home to the Muses— remain elusive. Those characteristics, in turn, are given to the Muses themselves. In *Muses- Revealing the Nature of Inspiration*, Forster writes:

So far, the muses seem at best ambiguous and at worst unreliable. These wise icons embody inspiration, give pleasure and insight, have memories that reach back as long as the planet has existed and have the capacity to intoxicate, excite and arouse those that invoke them. (loc 205)

Often the Muses are described as gentle goddesses. And yet, there is an inherent ambiguity and the subtle threat of danger in their nature. They do not tolerate blasphemy, and they have been known to exact revenge upon those who disregard their talents.

When one king boasted about the skills and beauty of his nine daughters— comparing

them to the attributes of the Muses— the nine goddesses transformed all of those daughters into magpies. Thus, the muse is not to be trifled with according to the ancient myths.

But more than that, the Muses make a game of truth— teasing the edges of mortal perception. They are daughters of Memory, and when the poet calls upon the Muses, he is also begging the favor of Memory which the Muses serve. In the invocations (which will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter), there is an implicit request for Memory to be true. But there is an ambiguity that surrounds the definition of truth. The Muses— representing creativity and memory and artistic integrity— dance on the line between perceptions of truth and the essence of reality. In the *Theogony*, the Muses are given a very short passage of dialogue that encompasses that ambiguity in their nature. Hesiod writes, quoting the Muses:

‘Shepherds that camp in the wild, disgraces, merest bellies:
we know to tell many lies that sound like truth,
but we know to sing reality, when we will.’ (3)

In these lines, Forster’s conclusions about the Muse’s ambiguity and unreliability ring especially true. But it is through this peculiar evasion of definitive things that the Muses become all the more fascinating. In their songs, they promise something. But the truth of their promises is rarely explained. They hide their workings and their meanings; even their gifts are shrouded with mystery. Then who are the Muses? Are they benefactresses of truth and memory? Or are they liars spinning tales to betray the senses? Or are those things mutually exclusive? In any case, the Muses— as they are slowly peeled from the

one-dimensional plane— represent an ambiguity that persists in the study of literature (and other academic genres) within the modern university and within the inner self.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MUSE AND HER DISGUISES

The Muses have taken many forms in mythology and literature. Their shape-shifting presents a challenge to traditional scholarship. Identity thrives on structure, and structure often requires classification. Scholars have spent generations creating categories, and they work to organize the world according to its attributes— placing like with like while giving names to the mysteries of nature. In the realm of psychology, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* provides the basis for diagnostic procedures. Biology relies on taxonomy to classify the wide variety of life across the planet. Theories from the scientific fields create frames that encompass bodies of knowledge. Understanding stems from the ability to name something and to predict its behavior. There is comfort in stability— in the belief that some things can remain unchanging, and this same comfort applies to the sense of self as well. To know oneself is to have an understanding of the inner core— to have a sense of “I” that remains solid in the face of so many other unknowns. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Smith and Watson explore the layers of meaning behind life writing. They address the nature of identity formation through classification, claiming:

Identities are marked in terms of many categories: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, family genealogy, religious belief, and political ideologies, to list the most obvious. These are differences that, at least for now, have meaning in the material and symbolic structures that organize human societies. But identity as difference implies also identity as likeness. (38.)

As a concept based in relativity, identity relies on the process of association. The self is defined— in part— by what it isn’t, and it shares certain qualities with other similar

selves. This method of classification and association creates a structural framework that addresses the world— providing a foothold that scholars use to engage mystery and achieve knowledge. However, while the framework and classification systems are vital for the human understanding of an immensely complex world, they can prove to be more inconsistent than what human comfort might prefer. Smith and Watson argue that identities “are constructed. They are in language. They are discursive. They are not essential— born, inherited, or natural— though much in social organization leads us to regard identity as given and fixed” (39).

As characters embodied within mythology, the Muses represent many of the contradictions apparent in human nature. They emerge from myth as divine women. Yet, they speak in riddles— promising truth and lies in the same breath. Their name and their gifts come in many forms. The Muses are a mirage. In one moment, they seem solid, but they quickly melt into absence or take another form entirely. Lynda Sexson addresses the Muses and their meanings in her essay *Magpies, The Robber Muses*. She argues:

To invite the muse is to forfeit the secure boundaries of identity. To locate skillful imagination outside the reach of the merely human is to make a claim, not only about art, but also about what it means to be human. The muses are so dangerous that even an essay *about* them is likely to shatter the illusory self. (71)

In mythology, the Muses embody certain attributes associated with identity as well as poetic form. They are women who possess an immortal divinity. Through that divinity, they have access to knowledge that mortals cannot claim. As goddesses devoted to inspiration, their work brings them into close proximity to mortals. In those dealings,

they illuminate creativity; they bestow stories and the authority to convey those stories to an audience. Yet, for all that they give, they withhold as well. They appear— for only a moment— in a corporeal form, but they perform the essence of their work in absence. The Muses resist the confinement of a singular identity. Like mortals, their identities have been molded and constructed throughout the passage of time. Different eras claim a different understanding of the muse. They are given different forms— altered identities. Yet, beneath the veneer of form and function, the very nature of the Muse defies the solidity of classification. Because their nature is tied so closely to human nature— through their work within inspiration— their ways shed light upon human ways. As Sexson suggests in her essay, this comparison is— indeed— dangerous to the comfortable sense of self.

To address the nature of muse-dom and the challenges it presents to mortal identity and understanding, it is useful to examine the shapes and forms that the Muses have adopted over time. Of course, in traditional mythology, the Muses are cast as female goddesses. The singing goddesses. They represent beauty and grace. As described in Hesiod's *Theogony*, they dance across mountains and frolic at springs. At times, they visit the mortals that they choose to bless with their gifts. Poets. Artists. In *The Lives of the Muses*, Francine Prose writes:

Whether or not we share Hesiod's exalted estimation of the psychotherapeutic benefits of poetry, these verses from *Theogony* demonstrate a faith in the muses' direct involvement in artistic creation. Or at least that's what the Greeks concluded about the source of the art, when the gods (with their Olympian omnipotence and wide range of lower impulses) still permitted a smooth conjoining of the holy and the profane. (4)

Thus, the Muses were depicted as messengers working between the mortal planes and the divine kingdoms. They performed through their relationship with mortals. Their songs provided inspiration for humans as they told stories— tales of Olympian glory and shades of truth. In ancient traditions of storytelling, the invocation served as a plea to the Muses— a request for their blessing in telling a story in a manner fitting the glory of the song. If the summons pleased the Muses, they would descend in some form of beauty— a butterfly or a trumpet’s call— and inspire the poet with the words of a song. The invocation has already been described as a means to establish credibility. It has also been described as a plea for possession— a kind of madness— that forges an intense relationship between the Muses and an artist. Hesiod explains his ability to speak of the gods by claiming the tutelage of the Muses. By their authority, he is allowed to tell stories of things beyond his personal experience. His relationship with the Muses both explains and authenticates his art. In *Muses: Revealing the Nature of Inspiration*, Julia Forster writes:

. . . it is the relationship between a muse and an artist which has the potential to ignite in the artist something akin to divine inspiration – a watershed moment, a brilliant insight, a radical expression. By first learning about these alliances between muse and artist, and then by exploring what the critical factor in the muse relationship was for the artist, we can begin to reveal the nature of inspiration itself. (loc 131)

Muses speak through their engagement with the mortal senses. They reach their subjects through touch, scent, sight, hearing, and taste. Mortals feel their presence through the intensity of the interaction. Over time, the concept of “muse” has maintained its emphasis on relationships. The word has become synonymous with inspiration, and it is

often applied to a relationship in which an individual (traditionally a woman) becomes a source of inspiration for an artist. Muses, then, may take mortal forms. Inspiration has been attributed to mysterious, divine forces, but it has also been gleaned from the seductive beauty of mortality.

Some scholars have devoted their attention to the relationships between artists and their mortal muses. Such relationships are tangled with the cultural identities of femininity and masculinity as constructed by the corresponding era. Thus, the identity of the muse has become entrenched in the identity of “woman” and reflects feminine roles in particular places at particular times. Julia Forster explores the nature of inspiration by analyzing these relationships in addition to archetypal and mythological muses in her book *Muses- Revealing the Nature of Inspiration*. Her analysis of the traditional muse speaks to gender roles and the expectations of femininity in certain times. Referencing Robert Graves—who spoke of muses in a tome entitled *The White Goddess*, Forster writes of the traditional muse, claiming:

Usually they are beautiful, commonly they are mute and impossibly, and perhaps unselfconsciously, graceful. Just by virtue of her presence, as Graves writes, this traditional type of muse should inspire and intoxicate; she doesn't actually have to do anything but be. (loc 105)

According to Forster, this traditional muse is a creature of beauty whose inherent nature attracts the attention of the artist. She does not invite the attention. Not actively. She merely represents the allure of beauty that can move the spirit of an artist. The traditional, mortal muse was to be seen and not heard. Her actions were restricted, and she was expected to bend to the will of the masculine artist. This version of the muse— a

weak-willed and passive creature designed to please the will of a patriarchal society— does not reflect all of the characteristics of the mythological muse. The nine goddesses were not passive. They were powerful wielders of transcendent knowledge, and they actively participated in the world of artists as performers and patrons of artistic talent. In the early mythologies, the Muses demonstrate a deliberate manipulation of silence and riddles. They speak of their own nature in a manner that suggests they are capable of influencing circumstances to whatever end they choose. They speak to Hesiod in the *Theogony*, claiming:

Shepherds that camp in the wild, disgraces, merest bellies
We know to tell many lies that sound like truth,
But we know to sing reality, when we will. (3)

The nine goddesses are singers— artists— like the mortals whom they bless. They understand the workings of creativity because they are representations of creativity— not blank canvases or attractive subjects for the artist to wield. Rather, the Muses seem to wield their artists through possession and madness, and they understand the blurry lines that separate fact and fiction, and they know how to walk along those lines, weaving one through the other until fact and fiction melt together in a complex web of storytelling and truth-telling. Sexson, in *Magpies, the Robber Muses*, records the dialogue between two characters as they debate the nature and importance of the Muses. When the debate turns to the conversation between Hesiod and the Muses, Sexson offers this interpretation:

. . . the muses ridiculed Hesiod even as they made him happy. They made a fool of him as the magpies made a fool of the old dog. They turned a mere shepherd into a poet; they taunted him even as they blessed him, calling him “belly.” A poet without a muse is a simple bag of longing, no more than a belly. There was a time when

poetry was peril, when both poetry and its peril were gifts from gods, when those gods were women. “Sing, heavenly Muse!” (77)

Though renowned for their ability to bless mortal artists with artistic talent, the Muses were exceptional artists themselves within mythology, and they were jealous of that power—striking at anyone foolish enough to challenge them in their gifts. The Muses taunted, blessed, and cursed their mortal followers and enemies with a possessive brand of passion. This underlying passion is largely ignored in Forster’s analysis of the ancient Muses. Instead, she tracks the development of the “muse as mortal” concept to its more recent appearances. Describing the development of the muse and the purpose of her book, Forster writes:

The archetype of the passive muse found in Ancient Greece and the Middle Ages has been shed in the centuries since then; muses have found their voice, and minds have opened to accommodate spiritual, male and mutual muses. This little book goes some way towards cataloguing a selection of those more traditional muses and then explodes the archetypal muse myth by looking at those spirited men, women and children of more recent times whose inspiration has proved indispensable. (loc 114)

According to Forster, when the gods fell silent on Mount Olympus and ceased their meddling in human affairs, the Muses passed their mantle to mortals who possessed the capacity to inspire others. These mortals became earthly muses, and their abilities were reminiscent of the powers belonging to the nine goddesses. Yet, while the divine Muses were considered beautiful singers who performed on Mount Olympus, their earthly counterparts were confined to silent existence. Stripped of their divinity, the identity of

the muse became more associated with her femininity— binding her with all the expectations of the corresponding age.

In *The Lives of the Muses*, Francine Prose investigates the lives of various mortal muses, and her work— to a certain degree— complements Forster’s analysis. Both writers consider the shift between the divine, mythological Muse and the mortal, feminine muse. Prose suggests that, as the pantheon’s importance became obsolete, “. . . culture needed an alternate explanation for the ways in which the life force expressed itself in culture” (4). While the pantheon’s divinity began to fade— replaced by new forms of religious thought— the mysteries surrounding creativity continued to persist. Artists continued to seek explanations for the inspiration that seemed to guide their creativity from an external vantage point, and they looked for new ways to discover inspiration. Prose writes:

Since a reversion to paganism was clearly out of the question, there was nowhere to go but down— from the divine to the mortal. And since falling in love is the closest that most people come to transcendence, to the feeling of being inhabited by unwilled, unruly forces, passion became the model for understanding inspiration. Why does the artist write or paint? The artist must be in love. And so the troubadour’s lady, the ideal unattainable object of courtly love, became the compromise candidate, positioned somewhere between the Virgin and an actual flesh-and-blood woman. (4)

Thus, the often-absent Muses of mythology became embodied by flesh and blood mortals like Alice Liddell, Hester Thrale, and Elizabeth Siddal. These historical women and their connection to famous artists have attracted scholarly attention. Both Prose and Forster have focused their research on the nature of these relationships. They are sometimes

beautiful and sometimes pathological. But they often function as a means to an end.

These relationships represent an understanding of the Muse as a means to productivity.

Prose writes:

Artists rarely create *for* the muse, to win or keep the muse's love and admiration, but rather for themselves, for the world, and for the more inchoate and unquantifiable imperatives of art itself. Their muses are merely the instruments that raise the emotional and erotic temperature high enough, churn up the weather in a way that may speed and facilitate the artist's labor. (12)

The Muse— according to this understanding— can become detached from the process of creativity. Her influence is appreciated, but she serves the artist as a catalyst— speeding the process of creativity to hasten the development of the desired product. Thus, the muse becomes an object. Though she is present within the process, she no longer represents the process or all of its complexities.

It is not surprising that the Muses have been found wanting by feminist scholars who see a largely patriarchal relationship between muses and their artists. Lynda Sexson— through the voice of a character skeptical about the value of Muses— alludes to this criticism, suggesting that muses persist in artistic traditions due to their supportive role beside male artists. She writes, “The muses are welcome because the tradition sings of divine women who grant glory to men; they reinforce patriarchy. . . . The muse is paradigmatic of womanly devotion to masculine glory” (77). And yet— as the supportive voice in Sexson's essay argues— the Muses of mythology were also demanding and controlling. They were jealous of their power— their own artistic gifts. While they blessed poets with songs and stories, they expected mortals to acknowledge

their prowess as master storytellers. When mortals dismissed the Muses' power, the nine goddesses were known to bestow curses upon their blasphemers. They were not docile. They were divine. They did not merely provoke the poet with their beauty and grace; they actively offered guidance and provided poets with the authority to tell stories that were not their own. Forster argues for the existence of a passive mythological muse, but the mythology provides evidence to the contrary. Though the Muses might embody a deceptively passive form to provoke the first flames of creativity, they actively perform within the process of creativity itself. The muse may show herself in a form that is external to the artist, but the bulk of her work occurs when she is an invisible, internal force within the artist.

Often, the Muses and their external forms are associated with human-like bodies, but the word has become embedded in language. It has been applied to living and non-living things— abstract concepts and concrete ideas. The Muses live in the notes of music; their laughter lingers in amusement. And in musings, they resign their contemplations. Language reflects the wide influence of the Muses within creative and mental processes, and that influence is especially strong within the concept of “museum.”

Museums are meant to preserve the past. They hold the artifacts of human history— representing memories. The word itself is derived from the name of ancient temples devoted to the nine goddesses. The museum is the Muses' home— a home that contains the creative artifacts of memory. The buildings themselves are like the bindings of a book, and the artifacts are the stories held between the pages. The museum is a creative act— a production of memory. Museums keep the songs that the Muses sing;

they echo with the stories told by the histories— stories spun by mortals and embodied by physical forms.

Museums contain things. Without the significance behind those things— without the stories that the objects tell— a museum is filled with nothing more than the empty husks of things. Things to look at. Things to touch. Things that are barely tethered to memory or life. When the connection between a story and its object is lost and no longer felt, then the subject may turn to stone as it does in the Medusa stories. Frozen and unmovable. To strip a story of its significance is to pin Nabokov's butterflies to a board without remembering their beauty. Such things are little more than trophies that mark a past success without allowing the potential for further growth. Confined to the shelves, artifacts and stories lose their power. The connection between the spirit of the story and its physical embodiment becomes severed. In *The Orphic Voice*, Elizabeth Sewell considers the nature of embodiment— the connection between an idea and an image and the manner by which that connection is perceived by the mind and the body. She writes:

Suppose that all forms are, whilst they are perceived as pure form by the mind-body, simultaneously perceived and enjoyed as images by the body-mind, if I may be allowed to shift that term so as to suggest a shift of emphasis. I do not mean that the body translates form, abstractly perceived, into pictures; rather, that all form addresses itself no less to the body than the mind, the former perceiving it by virtue of its own formalizing tendencies and uniting with it. (37)

The perception of any story, thought, or thing is anchored to the body and the mind. The connections spanning between the abstract and the physical world are tangled.

Sometimes indistinguishable. Perception is a complex web of sensory data that is absorbed and interpreted. Human nature— the very inner workings of the mind— strive

to categorize and identify the world, but by isolating details and examining the nature of a specific part of a thing, the significance of the whole may be placed at risk. Such isolation is sometimes necessary in the pursuit of knowledge. Yet, the pursuit of knowledge can become so segregated and so specific that scholars *see* the mechanisms of a thing while forgetting meaning and becoming blind to the subject's complex network of connections.

The picture of a neuron fixed to the page of a textbook will neatly organize its anatomy for the student studying neuroscience. But that image offers little recognition of the vast and intricate web of connections in which the neuron plays its part. The simplification of knowledge allows it to be more easily digested, but it can be misleading as to the intricacies behind the simplifications. Likewise, the artifacts of a museum— if they are only understood as objects tethered to a single idea or value— are undervalued in the terms of their ability to shed light on the great tapestry of history as it has been written and as it will be written. For in the understanding of a story written in the past, there is value in its existence for the understanding of the future. The museum sets the stage for a collision between the future and the past. Old knowledge. New knowledge. The Muses, as inhabitants of the museums, act as facilitators of this knowledge; yet, even though they often act behind the scenes, they are performers as well. This complicates their nature as they act— in one sense— as silent instigators. But in another sense, they are deeply embedded in the stories that are studied. They are represented by the images associated with their character, and yet they stand in the realm of the abstract as

something more than what the form of the character suggests. In *Shadows of Eros*,

Norman Weinstein writes:

Archetypal psychology reminds us that the soul speaks a wild language, one riddled with contraries and paradoxes. This image of the soul, ambivalent, fluttering in its growth between dream and waking, sanity and madness, anima and animus, satisfies the surrealist definition of the imagination perfectly. (138)

The Muses play at many things. Their identities are as flexible as the art that they inspire, and the extent of their art is demonstrated in the wide variety of museums. Some of the buildings hold artifacts of history—relics of the past. There are museums for military history. Maritime culture. Science. There are few things written or invented or discovered in the course of history that cannot find a home in a museum with the Muses.

The nine goddesses influence any creative process, and since history is a construction of the past, the Muses have their part in the mapping of history. The forces of imagination and inspiration are certainly present in the fields of science as well. Even the most empirically rigorous fields are bound by the Muses and their art. The divine madness. In *The Orphic Voice*, Sewell writes:

Every poem and recounted myth and scientific hypothesis and theological statement and theory of politics or history and every philosophy become records of happenings at particular times, all of which, if they have any life in them at all, have the capacity to be taken further, in varying degrees, by other minds present and to come. This means giving up the right to abstract language into timeless pattern, and making the effort to grasp it not as a fixed subject to time and process and change— to try to think in biological terms, perhaps. (23)

The Muses— who are the stories of old knowledge becoming new— touch everything that has emerged from mortal minds from poetry to science. The nine goddesses are the embodied images connected to the inspiration and creativity that connects all human activity. When they ignite a spark within an artist or a scientist, they tie a silver thread to the thought that takes form within the artist’s mind, and then they bind that thread to the art that emerges through form. The Muses are weavers, creating tapestries of art, but art is also an inheritance. The Muses take their threads to other artists— sometimes passing through the very grip of time— and they use the threads tied to the art of history to ignite the spark again in new artists in different place and different generations. In this way, the Muses are bound to the past and the future. Their identity as harbingers of imagination allows them to transcend time. They represent the seeming paradox of old becoming new, and they represent all the shades of art in all the workings of the mortal mind.

The Muses represent the changeability of identity— the unknown and uncomfortable places of the human psyche. In *Magpies, the Robber Muses*, Lynda Sexson writes, “That moment of not knowing, that resistance to the inevitable, that mystery, that silence embedded in every utterance, is the muse’s trap door” (73). The Muse— giver of inspiration— is an endless enigma. Though she offers knowledge, her presence is felt in the void of not-knowing. Her power humbles mortals with what they cannot know. Invisible things. The Muses are felt but rarely seen— at least, not in their truest forms. They have their feminine forms. They have their songs with which to speak. They have their museums in which they live. But their essence is silent. Hidden.

The Muses have many forms and many voices. In *The Dry Salvages*, T.S. Eliot describes the many voices of the sea and the interconnectedness of all things. He writes:

The sea has many voices / Many gods and many voices. /
The salt is on the briar rose, / The fog is in the fir trees. /
The sea howl / And the sea yelp, are different voices /
Often together heard: the whine in the rigging, / The
menace and caress of wave that breaks on water, / The
distant rote in the granite teeth, / And the wailing warning
from the approaching headland / Are all sea voices . . . (36)

Like the Muses— who are said to have their own voices though they speak as one mind— the sea may have a single voice that takes many forms. Under close scrutiny, the different voices can be identified— the separate tones bleeding into each other like the harmonies of a vast and untamable choir. Though the Muses may have many forms and many voices, they have one mind. They are deeply interconnected. Sexson writes:

Nevertheless, maybe the muse is a magpie. I will be glad to welcome her in magpie form. Muses are celebrated for the brilliant gifts they bestow, but I am interested in what they take away. Like thieving magpies, muses, too, are bandits who rob us of sleep, take our breath away, steal our sanity, and while they are at it, confuse trinket with treasure, exchange fortune for folly— transform everything into everything else. Muses replace one thing with another – my love for a “red, red rose,” the evening for a “patient etherized upon a table,” the world for “a stage,” death for an untimely frost upon the sweetest flower,” God for a watchmaker, mind for a steel trap . . . (73-74)

Even in the swirl of paradox and mystery, the Muse may be tracked through her images and the cultural, identity-bound implications surrounding those images. Such images are her footsteps— stamped in all directions through the forests of prose and invention. With her many contradictions, she repeatedly reminds her seekers that she is

not confined to one form or one time. She can live in many homes, and she can be a lie or a transcendent truth. She turns the world upside down to remind mortals of complexity and connection. She challenges our assumptions. Sewell writes, “Poetry, metaphor, mythology are highly realistic and down to earth. It is logic and mathematics which are the imaginative and fantastical exercise” (39). The Muse is a weaver of stories— lies and truths. Her fleeting touch leads mortal minds into madness, forcing them to see with eyes made new in old knowledge.

The nine goddesses are characters in many stories. They are nine names quickly lost in silence. They are myth. And truth. And mystery. They live at the edge of mountain springs where the winds blow wild, and they sleep in the halls of museums. Yet, regardless of their temporal identity, they always sing the same song— a song without words. A song that never changes— yet always remains the same. Sewell writes:

In the Orpheus story, myth is looking at itself. This is the reflection of myth in its own mirror. It promises to give Orpheus a special significance: for myth as living thought and the very type of thought in action and for all those other reflexive or self-reflecting forms; for the human organism as an indivisible whole trying to understand itself and its universe; for language and poetry reflecting back to the organism its own countenance and activity . . . (41)

The Muses stand beside the springs on mountainsides, and when mortals come to them— enchanted by their songs— the goddesses smile and beckon to those with enough talent to please them. In the glass of the clear spring water, the Muses reveal the mortals’ selves. The Muses offer inspiration, but through the sight they bestow upon mortals, they

reveal the nature of the mortal soul and the inherent creativity of all things— even within the mundane.

Marcel Proust understood the Muses very well in his novel *Swann's Way*. The book contains the story of creative memory. The narrator— searching for the secrets of the past— finds his Muses in the mundane and follows them into the mystery of creative construction. The Muses are in the taste of a madeleine. They are the moment of not-knowing that erupts into the everything. The past floating on a cup of tea. Proust writes:

. . . I carried to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had let soften a bit of madeleine. But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me. A delicious pleasure had invaded me, isolated me, without my having any notion as to its cause. It had immediately rendered the vicissitudes of life unimportant to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, acting in the same way that love acts, by filling me with a precious essence: or rather this essence was not merely inside me, it was me. (45)

The Muses lead the narrator to himself through the simple act of eating. They show themselves in the tea and in the madeleine— in the moment just before epiphany. He feels their presence and their power. He tries to seek them out, but as he reaches inward to grip the reflection, it dissolves like the ripples on a pond. Not quite solid. Having sparked the flame within the mortal, the Muses retreat. They let the fires grow. Proust writes:

I put down the cup and turn to my mind. It is up to my mind to find the truth. But how? Such grave uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is also the obscure country where it must seek and where all its baggage will be nothing to it. Seek? Not only that: create. It is face-to-face with something that does not

yet exist and that only it can accomplish, then bring into its light. (45-46)

The narrator catches the Muses in their work, and while he seeks the inspiration that they offer, he pauses. He considers the process of receiving. The mystery that rises before the knowing. The pulling at threads long lost to shadow. The creation of a memory— born to the past and resurrected in the present moment. In the haze of muse-given inspiration, the narrator reaches for the images that will answer his silent questing. He pulls at memory; he leans against the traces (scent and smell and taste) that transcend the decay of time. And then, Proust writes:

And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea that my aunt used to give me (though I did not yet know and had to put off to much later discovering why this memory made me so happy), immediately the old gray house on the street, where her bedroom was, came like a stage set to attach itself to the little wing opening onto the garden that had been built for my parents behind it (that truncated section which was all I had seen before then); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went on errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine. And as in that game enjoyed by the Japanese in which they fill a porcelain bowl with water and steep in it little pieces of paper until then indistinct which, the moment they are immersed, stretch and twist, assume colors and distinctive shapes, become flowers, houses, human figures, firm and recognizable, so now all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water lilies of the Vivonne, and the good people of the village and their little dwellings and the church and all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this which is acquiring form and solidity, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea. (47-48)

In early mythology, there were only three Muses. That number evolved to include the nine goddesses— daughters of Mnemosyne. Memory. Marcel Proust recognized the intricate connections between Muses and memory. Past. Present. Future. He felt the brush of mystery and the electricity of epiphany. He followed the Muses to the spring where he beheld the reflection of himself. But that reflection was complicated by its resurrection. The spring was not a window. The memory was created. It was conjured. It was made new from the ashes of the old forgotten past. The Muses, then, bound to the arts and the past and the future, are bound to their mother's nature. The Muses are the flowers of memory. Patricia Reis, in *Mnemosyne's Well of Remembrance*, writes, "Without Mnemosyne there would be no art, theater, neither tragedy nor comedy, no music, dance, poetry, hymns, and no history or science of astronomy" (85). Memory says much about the nature of creativity, but the Muses also characterize the imaginative components of Memory. The two are tightly bound.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MOTHER OF THE MUSES

When the narrator of *Swann's Way* experiences the taste of a madeleine, he conjures a memory that resembles art— a memory that *is* art. The moment represents the collision between memory and creativity. This is not an unusual interaction; imagination has always been a characteristic of memory. In remembrance, there is a resurrection— a summoning and a creation— of a memory. In the taste and scent of a small French cake, the Muse reveals her power. She calls to the narrator— the one who remembers— and in the call, she sings a song of creation. The act of remembering becomes a creative act based on the conjuring of a past— a past that tells the story of a life.

Memory is not always perceived as a creative act. It is too commonplace— a facet of daily life. It is the duty of memory to maintain the records: grocery lists, conversations, keys, dates, and times. Recollections of the past, experiences of the present, and reminders for the future are all coded and tucked within the dusty corridors of memory. There, they are kept for safekeeping until the need arises for their remembrance. Memory has been compared to a room where experience is stored once it has been recorded by the senses. In this sense, the concept of memory is like a museum. Thick walls. Cabinets filled with artifacts. This is a museum filled with the traces of an external world, and it might be understood— albeit mistakenly— that the artifacts are acquired by the “proprietors” of memory, experience. Such an understanding suggests that memories do not change with the passing of time. Thus, memory can be interpreted as the static storage place where memories live. And while some individuals might confess that their memories function in a less than perfect capacity, few seem to look

beyond the “things” of memory to investigate the walls and the floors that construct the chamber itself. And with their preoccupation with the products of memory, many people become blind to the work of the Muses within the very corridors of the mind.

Proust— in his efforts to reclaim the mysteries of lost time— traces the experience of remembrance from the moment of inspiration to the realization of epiphany. He explores the absence of memory. The void. The uncertainty. And then the moment of conjuring. Near the conclusion of *Swann’s Way*, the narrator stands on the brink of one such epiphany. Musicians are playing, but the narrator is lost in his own thoughts. Conflicted. Searching his memory— his sense of self— for answers to an unrequited love, he tries to conjure the understanding that he requires. And then the music speaks to him. As a lover of songs, he is drawn to the power of the concerto. Music was counted among the Muses’ gifts. They were excellent singers, and they reserved the right to bestow their talents on worthy mortals. Thus, music was one of their many arts, but it also served as their voice— a form that they could utilize to reach mortal ears. Just as the orator called upon the muses through the invocation— begging them to sing *through* him— the narrator of *Swann’s Way* hears a voice of enlightenment in a wordless song. Proust writes:

There are tones in a violin – if we cannot see the instrument and therefore cannot relate what we hear to our image of it, which changes the sound of it— so similar to those of certain contralto voices that we have the illusion a singer has been added to the concert. We lift our eyes, we see only the bodies of the instruments, as precious as Chinese boxes, but at times we are still fooled by the deceptive call of the siren; at times too we think we hear a captive genie struggling deep inside the intelligent bewitched, and tremulous box, like a devil in a holy-water basin;

sometimes, again it is like a pure and supernatural being that passes through the air uncoiling its invisible message. (360)

The music—the Muse within the music— speaks to the narrator as he listens without the misleading aid of his eyes. At first detached from the sight of the instruments, the wordless song becomes a voice. And the instruments become the body of a hidden spirit— an ethereal genie locked within a “bewitched” shell. To the narrator— caught in the vision of his senses— the music becomes a ritual of conjuration. The music reaches beyond the scope of words and their meanings, becoming an invisible entity. Felt but unseen. The narrator is drawn to the invisible presence and to the epiphany that the entity seems to offer. Proust writes:

. . . Swann, who could no more see it than if it had belonged to an ultraviolet world, and who was experiencing something like the refreshing sense of a metamorphosis in the momentary blindness with which he was struck as he approached it, felt it to be present, like a protective goddess, a confidante of his love, who in order to be able to come to him in the midst of the crowd and take him aside to talk to him, had assumed the disguise of this body of sound. And while it passed, light soothing, murmured like a perfume, telling him what it had to tell him, as he scrutinized every word, sorry to see them fly off so quickly, he involuntarily made the motion with his lips of kissing the harmonious fleeting body as it passed. (360-361)

In this passage, the muse collides with the perception of experience as it connects to the imagination and memory. She is bound to the music; her embodied form— though invisible and silent— speaks in a voice that offers words while simultaneously remaining wordless. Her touch is fleeting, but even the briefest touch of her whispered presence moves the very core of the narrator. In a moment of alchemy, the substance of his past

fuses with a new understanding that feeds the present. Old becomes new. Memories are summoned, but they are also created. They are fragments of time drawn from the shadow of experience and molded by perception. The act of remembrance holds far more creative potential than what is often expected, and it functions with far more complexity than a simple recording device. The walls of memory may hold the artifacts of a life, but the chamber hums with the power and the voices of the Muses who honor their mother with their songs. In every moment— with every new experience and conjured memory— the walls of the great chamber will fluctuate. Memory is constantly reconstructed by imagination and creativity, characteristics often attributed to the Muses. According to mythology, Muses and Mnemosyne (memory) share a familial bond. Even in the old stories, there was a sense of connection between the powers of recollection and creativity.

Mnemosyne was the titan goddess of memory. Every form of art— every creative breath— was anchored to her persona. She was seen as the wellspring and the roots of remembrance. The Muses— as her descendants— have inherited their powers from Mnemosyne as well as Zeus. They possess fragments of her nature, employing themselves in the pursuit of specific art forms— traditions born of memory that are cast into the future as new artworks blossom from the traditional roots. In *Mnemosyne's Well of Remembrance*, Patricia Reis explores the nature of the titan goddess and her connection to the muses. She argues:

According to the earliest Greek writers, the original Muses were three goddesses: Melete (Care), Mneme (Memory), And Aoide (Song). Later Greek tradition made Mnemosyne, or Memory the Mother of the nine Muses. Without Mnemosyne there would be no art, theater, neither tragedy nor comedy, no music, dance, poetry, hymns, and

no history or science of astronomy. What did the Greeks know that they made Memory a divine thing as well as the Mother, the originating source, of those nine fashioning forms of creative expressions? (85)

If the Muses are wellsprings of creativity and imagination, then Mnemosyne is the wellspring of all that which makes the art forms possible. As mother of the Muses, Mnemosyne may count herself as an additional muse— closely bound to the divinity of transcendence and the mortality of human thought. Memory is undoubtedly internal. In the fundamental sense, it is the place within the mind where memories are housed. The artifacts of memory may be seen as externally derived, but they are hung within the mortal mind— which ties Mnemosyne very closely to the mortal planes. Yet, just as the concept of divinity problematizes the understanding of the Muses, it also problematizes simplistic concepts of memory. In mythology, divinity often indicates the presence of the unknown— an active manipulator within the forces of the world. Giving memory such divinity, suggests that the titan goddess possesses an active power surrounded by mystery. Memory is more than a recording device; there is something active and mysterious in its mechanisms. Furthermore, as the seat of creativity— the roots of the Muses— Memory’s influence is much more widespread than it would be if she were nothing more than a recorder. Patricia Reis explores the nature of Memory and her Muse-like qualities:

If we think about it at all, we realize that memory— the ability to recall, consciously or unconsciously, what one has learned or experienced— functions like a good mother in that to some extent it ensures our survival. Our instinctual knowledge, our personal identities, our kinship relations all ride on the dependability of our memory. Memory appears to unite past and present. Memory knits

together, through association, what has happened in time, so we may have a coherent and continuous sense of self. Memory provides the living tissue with which our life stories are woven together; it gives us the integrity of our biographies and our history. But we might rightly ask is Memory truly trustworthy? Isn't Memory a rather problematic and unreliable mother? (88)

The same questions have been posed to the Muses— their character and purpose. In one breath, the goddesses promise epiphany, and in the next, they murmur lies behind their songs and smiles. Again, their words to Hesiod ring true: We know to tell many lies that sound like truth / But we know to sing reality, when we will” (3). The Muses speak of falsehoods without apology, and their mother may share that sense of boldness.

Mnemosyne has been accused of deceit, and some say that she is fickle.

The Muses have been known to curse the mortals who displease them. Memory has been accused of employing the curse of forgetfulness. And occasionally, Memory has been accused of falsifying herself by presenting recollections that were never grounded in reality. The concept of false memories— their origins and consequences— have been addressed in the realm of psychology, which has undertaken the study of memory from social, biological, and psychological approaches. The research completed within psychology has challenged assumptions regarding the mechanisms and dependability of memory. The field has moved from an understanding of memory as a static storage unit to memory as a constantly constructed perception of experience. The concept of constructed memory has problematized the reliability of memory.

Often, memory is associated with its quantitative capacities within scientific study. To *know* something is to have the ability to *remember* it with accuracy. In ancient

times, human memory was entrusted with all forms of knowledge and art. The Muses led mortal minds through the corridors of memory to the art that lived between human understanding and divine transcendence. Yet, even as the artists reached for the meaning behind the words, they reached for the words as well. In the realm of Mnemosyne, they built palaces to house their knowledge. Memory theaters. Memory palaces. And museums. Of course, the content of a memory palace attracted more attention than the walls that kept the memories safe. As mortals summoned castles in the dark mists of the enigmatic mind, they focused on the *preserving* and not their sense of *creating* in their earnest efforts to retain the quantitative knowledge,.

The emphasis on quantity and accuracy is exacerbated by constructed expectations. In academia, students are often assessed by their ability to recite learned material. Grammatical rules. Vocabulary. Mathematical formulas. Human anatomy. The steps of scientific methodology. These rules and facts are important as they lay the groundwork for more complicated feats; it is good to understand them. However, many assessment strategies assess the accuracy of knowledge without acknowledging the *process* of memory itself or the importance of the Muses— imagination and creativity— within that process. Memory palaces are more than exhibitions of memory feats performed by intellectual athletes; they indicate the creative powers of memory. The walls are just as important as the content held within them. If a palace is not soundly built, then its inhabitants are placed at risk. If the mechanisms— the processes— of memory are better understood, then it is likely that the content of memory will be better maintained. Memory is much more than a storehouse, though it may serve as one. Its

contents do not represent an exact representation of the external input. That input is filtered and interpreted according to the individual and according to all which has already been learned. Memory is not static; it is fallible, and it is deeply creative. Memories are not recorded; they are built. Within the halls of memory, the Muses work. The museum may house the Muses in the physical world, but within the mind, the Muses' home is memory. Their identity and human identity take root within memory— where constructs of experience provide the material of creativity, the raw ingredients present before the alchemical reaction that is driven by inspiration.

Memory represents the constructed self. It contains the knowledge and perceptions that have shaped the individual. Many mortals often bind their internal sense of self and their confidence in that self to the dependability and accuracy of their memories. Again, stability provides comfort for the individual. Rather than stand on obviously uncertain ground, mortals prefer the illusion of constancy. They are driven to connect ideas and to find reason in action— to find patterns in stories, memories, dreams, and in lives. If there is reason in life, experiences can be better understood, which cements the substance of thought by building confidence in the truth of an idea. Patricia Reis writes: “It is not just our bodies that are influenced by place, but our minds—Our ideas, our emotions, our characters, our identities— all are shaped, in part, by places” (97). When the narrator of *Swann's Way* tastes the delicate flavor of the Muse-possessed madeleine, his memory emerges— from the cup of tea— anchored to place. The village of Combray.

Experience is rarely written in the void of empty space. It is bound to time. Context. A story without setting is a story lost to an impenetrable shroud. Even the Muses—the elusive goddesses and the abstract ideals—were bound to places. The Mountain of Helicon. Mount Olympus. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Smith and Watson explain the nature of spaces:

We as subjects are bodies inhabiting space; but more important, we are positioned subjects, in and of place. Emplacement, as the juncture from which self-articulation issues, foregrounds the notions of location and subject position, both concepts that are inescapably spatial. The concept of location emphasizes geographical situatedness; but it is not just geographical site. It includes the national, ethnic, racial, gendered, sexual, social, and life-cycle coordinates in which narrators are embedded by virtue of their experiential histories and from which they speak. (42)

Place becomes an anchor that binds the abstract to the physical world. The divine realms to the mortal planes. And the unknown to the epiphany.

Yet, even though Mnemosyne and her daughters promise a transcendent understanding of the world, their ever-constant elusiveness reflects upon the ever-changing nature of humanity. Even as mortals reach for truth, their own assumptions blind them. Seeking stability and certainty, mortal minds reject the fluidity of self and creativity in exchange for solid definitions and unchanging facts.

Yet, Lynda Sexson writes, “The muses are so dangerous that even an essay *about* them is likely to shatter the illusory self” (71). In the broadest sense, everything that is felt and accomplished, learned and forgotten, read and written, leaves a mark on the vast canvas of memory, and the Muses live in the halls of memory. They are the inhabitants of the mind and a reflection of the insubstantial (and yet transcendent) mortal self.

Caught between the mortal world and divine understanding, the Muses represent the conflict between the need to *see* and to know and the abstract mystery that permeates every aspect of life. They are— simultaneously certainty and the unknown. Truth and falsehood. The Muses conjure what is and what *appears* to be. And in the novel *Swann's Way*, Proust writes of memory and conjuring. He writes of the *experience* of remembering— of reconstructing memory. Drawing once again upon the collision of Muses, Mnemosyne and mortal understanding, Proust describes the experience of reading:

After this central belief, which moved incessantly during my reading from inside to outside, toward the discovery of the truth, came the emotions aroused in me by the action in which I was taking part, for those afternoons contained more dramatic events than does, often, an entire lifetime. These were the events taking place in the book I was reading; it is true that the people affected by them were not “real,” as Françoise said. But all the feelings we are made to experience by the joy or the misfortune of a real person are produced in us only through the intermediary of an image of that joy or that misfortune; the ingeniousness of the first novelist consisted in understanding that in the apparatus of our emotions, the image being the only essential element, the simplification that would consist in purely and simply abolishing real people would be a decisive improvement. . . . (thus our heart changes, in life, and imagination: in reality it changes, as certain natural phenomena occur, slowly enough so that, if we are able to observe successively each of its different states, in return we are spared the actual sensation of change) (86-87).

This passage describes the experience of reading as an act that allows the individual to absorb the experiences of the characters without having— in reality— accomplished those feats. A book can invoke emotion, and that emotion— having been felt— touches

memory. The reader, then, does not merely remember the book that he read but the substance of the book as well. Books are— in Proust’s descriptions— meant to be actively and not passively examined.

Our memories are not passive. Left to its own devices, a memory can conjure stories of its own without the permission of its owner. Yet, with discipline, memory can become a palace conjured by the will of its mistress designed to hold the mind’s treasures. Given the chance to explore and recreate what has already been remembered, memory can become the wellspring of “new” ideas— explicit knowledge.

Creativity has been more specifically defined by Donald Peterson in his article *Creativity and the Varieties of Explicitation*. He writes that “the range of phenomena we call “creative” is very broad and in this chapter I shall concentrate on those which involve “re-representation”: cases in which we increase our knowledge by reconfiguring knowledge which we already possess” (139). In other words, an act of creativity may be the result of reconstructed memory. There is a certain contradiction that seems apparent with this claim. Is it possible for new information to be “new” if it comes from old information? Peterson suggests that this seeming paradox does not, in fact, exist beneath the surface. Memory is not static; it shifts and grows and changes with every interaction with itself and new input. At first, knowledge may be anchored in memory as fact— as a simple *knowing*— but given time, practice, and additional input, that “knowing” may become something that leads to “doing.” The musician who must flounder through a particular piece of music may grow to master that musical work with flourish and

flexibility. Knowledge— which is put to the chasms of memory— must be processed and planted. Then it must be allowed to grow. Peterson writes:

We have something new and something not new, but this is no paradox, since cause and effect operate at different levels. In creative explicitation, the cause is that a procedure or part of the cognitive system gains applicability or access to internal or external representations, and the effect is an amplification of system-output. Thus the effect is an emergent phenomenon: it has a cause, but this is not of its own type (it does not itself constitute an item of system-output). Hence the result of explicitation may be *new* without its lacking antecedents, history and cause; and the explicitation itself may, without paradox, be creative (147).

The fallibility of memory is linked to the reconstructive capacities of the mind. The ability to conjure memories through suggestion and imagination has led to dangerous outcomes within witness testimony and psychoanalysis where the accuracy of memory becomes especially important. However, the same capacity that makes memory “fallible” in terms of relating directly to the external world also lends an immensely creative power to memory— the ability to go beyond what is recorded into something new and emergent. The greatest power of memory lies— to some extent— within its capacity to *be* fallible

If memory truly functioned as a recording device by merely absorbing the replication of an experience in all accuracy, the result might prove more compatible with the understanding of memory as a static storage center for the details of a life. If the facts of experience flowed directly to the halls of memory— without the alteration or elaboration of perception— there might be less concern as to the validity of a memory when it is addressed to the outside world. Yet, in exchange for such accuracy, the halls

of memory would become like the bindings of a forgotten book. The words would be present— etched like scars across the yellowing pages. But there would be no potential for growth. The Muses would be frozen in a perpetual winter without the hope of spring to thaw them. A memory without flexibility would be like a museum that is never updated— never blessed with new understanding. Though it may hold artifacts that are perfectly preserved and untouched by the passing of time, a static memory will never become a fertile ground for creativity because creativity and the Muses thrive upon the ability to weave connections between that which is known and that which is unknown. A static memory will only contain that which is known because— to dwell on the shadows beyond the reach of proven fact— is to engage with a force that constantly changes and defies categorization. The unknown is not comfortable, but it is necessary. Without that moment of not-knowing, there is no possibility for the manifestation of an epiphany or for new understandings of old knowledge. In essence, memory is much more than a storage center; it is a hothouse that cultivates the growth of new ideas. The Muses are the gardeners— the cultivators— of those flowers whether the blossoms take the form of prose, poetry, or science.

CONCLUSION: THE DANCE OF THE MUSES

A book lies forgotten on a cluttered desk; the pages are torn, and the ink is blotted. In a field of flowers, a butterfly clings to a blade of tall grass and hides from the breath of a hot summer wind. Hikers walk on a nearby trail, but no one sees the muse in the meadow. No one reads the calligraphy scrawled across the butterfly's wings. And no one hears the music in the silence or the voice of the sunlight that falls through the branches of an old oak tree. But then there is a moment. A collision. An artist hears the whisper of a story and sees an ember of an idea beneath the ashes of the mundane. Sometimes the flicker vanishes before it can be caught, but sometimes, there is a grasping and a falling through uncharted shadows and a resurrection of an understanding, as the seed of old knowledge becomes creativity's flower. The book is rediscovered, and the words begin to thaw—reclaiming their power in the imagination of an eager scholar. The butterfly becomes a poem, and the voices bleed into a new song.

The Muses have been used to explain the origins of creativity. It has been suggested that they were invented to replace the mystery that surrounds the art of storytelling; their existence explains that mystery by suggesting that creativity and inspiration originate externally from the artist. Epiphany is the product of an external force, which explains the apparent suddenness and clarity of the new understanding. However, the contradictions of the Muses' nature—their tendency to offer truth and lies in the same—problematizes their own story. The Muses are more than the origins of a story. Just as memory is more than a storage compartment, the Muses are more than a representation of poetic form. They are the stories of becoming. The artist may see a

butterfly or hear a song in the silence, but if there is only an acknowledgment of the Muses' presence, the knowing may not extend beyond the nature of an acquaintance. The Muses' and their work take place within the collision between old and new knowledge. That collision may be sparked by an external stimulus, but it may take place solely within the imagination as well. Regardless of the spark that begins the song, the Muses represent the Proustian moment in which an epiphany unfurls from the thickets of the unknown. The Muses have been interpreted as characters belonging to an external mythology, but their relevance lies in the manner by which their changeable and elusive nature complements an understanding of internal processes of creativity. The Muses are the stories of becoming—the stories of the stories that take root within memory and imagination.

Bound so closely to the landscapes of the mortal mind, the Muses reveal many things about human identity, memory, creativity, and inspiration. They are weavers—tying threads between thoughts to create a vast network of understanding that transcends particular fields of study. They remind scholars that mathematical equations can be poetic constructions and that great advances in science begin with the spark of a willing imagination. The Muses—with their secretive smiles and enticing songs—remind mortals to find value in the lies that sound like truths, and they challenge the comfortable assumptions that so often color human perception. In the academic world, it is admirable to cultivate a foundation of knowledge gleaned from textbooks and lectures that tap the veins of academic discourse. But the Muses—dancing among the gardens of traditional knowledge—dare the artists and the scholars to relinquish that which is named and

known for that which is not known and unnamed. In that collision— in that moment of exploration— at the frontiers of imagination, there is a potentiality for discovery. From the roots of old knowledge and from the chambers of dynamic memory, a new song can be created from the weavings of mystery and wisdom.

The Muses do not easily bestow their gifts. There is a challenge in their offering. Artists have tried and have often failed to trap the Muses who taunt them with stories. Inspiration cannot be bottled any more than a ray of sunlight can be clutched within the hand. But the sunlight can be felt— the warmth pooling within the palm like the brush of the celestial body hidden within the tones of the Proustian violin. But the challenge and the mystery seems necessary for the resurrection of an epiphany. Through their taunting and their elusiveness, the Muses dare mortals to enter their dance. And in the dancing, the artist begins to live within the moments that craft the stories until the story and the artist are bound by the ever-expanding and tangled threads of creative understanding. Perhaps— of their many forms and many voices— the greatest song that can be attributed to the Muses is the one that reminds mortals of the necessity of engagement— of touching and speaking to the thing that is studied so that the beauty and the meaning is never lost through negligence.

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