

Orpheus' Hymn to the Muses



Muses are the Nymphs of the Greek Poets. Eager to investigate the laws of nature and study philosophy, the Muses are intoxicated with the nectar of divine knowledge.

*To the Muses*¹

The Fumigation from Frankincense

Daughters of Jove, loud-sounding, and divine,
Renown'd, Pierian, sweetly speaking Nine;
To those whose breasts your sacred furies fire,
Much form'd, the objects of supreme desire.
Sources of blameless virtue to mankind,
Who form to excellence the youthful mind:
Who nurse the soul, and give her to descry
The paths of right with reason's steady eye.
Commanding queens, who lead to sacred light
The intellect refin'd from error's night;
And to mankind each holy rite disclose,
For mystic knowledge from your nature flows.
Clio, and Erato who charms the sight,
With thee, Euterpe, minist'ring delight:
Thalia flourishing, Polymnia fam'd,
Melpomene from skill in music nam'd:
Terpsichore, Urania heav'nly bright,
With thee who gav'st me to behold the light²
Come, venerable, various pow'rs divine,
With fav'ring aspect on your mystics shine;
Bring glorious, ardent, lovely, fam'd desire,
And warm my bosom with your sacred fire.

¹ Orpheus' Mystical Hymn LXXVI.

[*Illustrations*: Frontispiece: Flute Player, by Charles-Amable Lenoir. | Page 5: Apollo and the Muses, by Simon Vouet | Page 6: Sirens and Ulysses, by William Etty | Page 10: Polyhymnia, by Paul Vincenti]

² [In the original text the Muse Kalliope is named here. — Prometheus Trust.]

Thomas Taylor on the Muses that harmonise our triune energies by elevating them to the Noetic Unity of Spirit.

[Says Proclus, in Hesiod Op. p. 6:]

The Muses derive their appellation from *investigation*: for they are the sources of erudition.

He adds that

Jupiter is said to be the father, and Mnemosyne the mother of the Muses, because the learner ought to possess both intelligence and memory, the latter of which Mnemosyne imparts, and the former Jupiter.¹

From discoursing about king Apollo, Plato proceeds to the Muses,^[406a] and the name of music: for Apollo is celebrated as Musagetes; and he indeed is a monad with respect to the harmony in the world, but the choir of the Muses is the monad of all the number of the henhead (*i.e.* nine). From both likewise the whole world is bound in indissoluble bonds, and is one and all-perfect, through the communications of these divinities; possessing the former through the Apolloniacal monad, but its all-perfect subsistence through the number of the Muses. For the number nine, which is generated from the first perfect number (that is three), is, through similitude and sameness, accommodated to the multiform causes of the mundane order and harmony; all these causes at the same time being collected into one summit for the purpose of producing one consummate perfection.

For the Muses generate the variety of reasons with which the world is replete;

And the Muses give subsistence to the harmony of soul;

The Muses distribute the phenomena according to harmonical reasons;

And though both give subsistence to the same things, yet the Muses effect this according to number,

And the Muses indeed distribute the unity of Apollo;

but Apollo comprehends in union all the multitude of these.

but Apollo is the leader of intellectual and impartible harmony.

but Apollo comprehends unapparent and separate harmony.

but Apollo according to union.

but Apollo unites harmonic multitude, which he also converts and comprehends.

For the multitude of the Muses proceeds from the essence of *Musagetes*, which is both separate, and subsists according to the nature of *The One*; and their number evolves the one and primary cause of the harmony of the universe.

¹ Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *Hymns and Initiations*. (Vol. V of "The Thomas Taylor Series") From: The Prometheus Trust, 2003 (2nd ed.). "The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus or Initiations," LXXVI, *To the Muses*, with Taylor's note and excerpt from his translation of the Commentary of Proclus on Plato's *First Alcibiades*, p. 144.

Philosophy causes our psychical powers to be moved harmoniously, in symphony with real beings, and in accordance with the orderly motions of celestial orbs.

Philosophy is the Greatest Music.

Muses are the sources of the variety of harmonies. They impart to souls the investigation of Truth, and to bodies a multitude of powers.¹ The Musagetes himself unfolds Truth to souls according to One Intellectual Simplicity.

That such being the etymology of the name of the Muses, since Plato² calls philosophy the greatest music, as causing our psychical powers to be moved harmoniously, in symphony with real beings, and in conformity to the orderly motions of the celestial orbs; and since the investigation of our own essence and that of the universe leads us to this harmony, through a conversion to ourselves and more excellent natures — hence also we denominate the Muses from investigation. For Musagetes himself unfolds truth to souls according to one intellectual simplicity; but the Muses perfect our various energies, elevating them to an intellectual unity. For investigations have the relation of matter, with reference to the end from invention; just as multitude with respect to *The One*, and variety with respect to simplicity. We know, therefore, that the Muses impart to souls the investigation of truth, to bodies the multitude of powers, and that they are everywhere the sources of the variety of harmonies.³

Muses are Celestial Souls.

As there are principally nine celestial souls, *viz.* the soul of the world, and the souls of the eight celestial spheres, to which our souls are at different times accommodated; hence, souls in their descent receive nine differences of character. But the philosophic genius has the first rank, because it is naturally adapted to the investigation of everything human and divine. And as such a genius is studious of wisdom and truth, and the first beauty subsists in these; hence, with great propriety, it brings with it the pursuit of beauty. But we receive the image of beauty through the sight and hearing; and hence Plato connects with this character a musician and a lover: the former on account of audible, and the latter of visible beauty. But the next character is that of a king, who indeed extends a universal providence towards mankind, but whose contemplations are not so ample as those of the philosopher. The providential energies of those which follow, are still more contracted. But when he distributes prophets and mystics into the fifth order, we must not suppose that he means such as are divine, but mercenary and vulgar prophets, who do not operate from science and art, but from custom and chance.⁴

¹ Cf. Choragos and his choir of virtue and immortal love, Krishna and his gopis, and so forth.

² In *Phædrus*, 61a

³ Taylor T. (Tr. & Annot.). *The Works of Plato*. (Vol. V of a set of five volumes & Vol. XIII of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1996. Taylor’s endnotes from his translation of Proclus’ Scholia on Plato’s *Cratylus*, 406a. [Stephanus lines 176-77, p. 607]

⁴ *ibid.*, (Vol. III). Excerpt from endnote 16, pp. 413-14, being Taylor’s Additional Notes on Plato’s *Phædrus*. [Westerink line 248d, p. 350: “*Likewise Jupiter the mighty leader, etc.*”]

The Muses, the Celestial Spheres, the sensible world, the whole soul of the universe, and the souls of ordinary men, had a consubistent progression.

According to Hermeas, the interpretation of this place by the divine Iamblichus is as follows: Socrates calls men souls dwelling in the intelligible world: for souls before they live a mortal life abide on high in the intelligible, contemplating forms themselves together with the supermundane Gods. Thus then men were before the Muses had a being, that is, before the spheres and the sensible world; not that the term *before* signifies here temporal precedency, but a subsistence¹ prior to this apparent progression of the spheres. For this is the generation of the Muses, an apparent subsistence, proceeding from the demiurgus into the sensible world. The Muses, therefore, and the spheres, the sensible world, and the whole soul of the universe, and the partial souls of men, had a consubistent progression. These souls, too, as being recently born, and remembering what they had seen in the intelligible region, were averse to generation, and were unwilling to eat and drink, *i.e.* were not willing to partake of sensible opinion; for they possessed intelligible nutriment. Hence, wasting away, they at length perished, *i.e.* they reascended to the intelligible.²

Terpsichore, therefore, is the inspective guardian of all dancing.³

Erato, says Hermeas, is denominated from Love, and from making the works of Love, lovely: for she cooperates with Love.

Calliope is denominated from the eye (*παρα την οπα*); and

Urania presides over astronomy.

Through these two goddesses we preserve our rational part from being in subjection to the irrational nature. For, through sight surveying the order of the celestial Gods, we properly arrange our irrational part. And further still, through rhythms, philosophy, and hearing, we elegantly dispose that which we contain of the disorderly and void of rhythm.⁴



¹ *Viz.* an *unapparent* subsistence: for this is prior to an *apparent* subsistence; in the same way as every cause, so far as it is a cause, is prior to its effects, though it may be temporally consubistent with it.

² *ibid.*, endnote 28, p. 419, being Taylor's Additional Notes on Plato's *Phædrus*. [Westerink line 259b, p. 373]

³ Who then are those that honour the goddess in the dance? Not those who dance well, but those who live well through the whole of the present existence, elegantly arranging their life, and dancing in symphony with the universe.

⁴ *ibid.*, endnote 30, p. 420, being Taylor's Additional Notes on Plato's *Phædrus*. [Westerink line 259d, p. 374]

Ralph Emerson on Plato domesticating the soul in nature

He wrote on the scale of the mind itself, so that all things have symmetry in his tablet. He put in all the past, without weariness, and descended into detail with a courage like that he witnessed in nature. One would say that his forerunners had mapped out each a farm or a district or an island, in intellectual geography, but that Plato first drew the sphere. He domesticates the soul in nature: man is the microcosm. All the circles of the visible heaven represent as many circles in the rational soul. There is no lawless particle, and there is nothing casual in the action of the human mind. The names of things, too, are fatal, following the nature of things. All the gods of the Pantheon are, by their names, significant of a profound sense.

The gods are the ideas.

Pan is speech, or manifestation;

Saturn, the contemplative;

Jove, the regal soul; and

Mars, passion.

Venus is proportion;

Calliope, the soul of the world;

Aglaiia, intellectual illustration.¹



¹ From *Emerson: Plato, New Readings from Representative Men*, ¶ 8; p. 745

George Mead on gods and their shaktis.¹

Another important point to remember is the androgynous nature of the Powers, symbolized as male-female. This was probably the subject of the Orphic work which I have called, in the list of works, *Twin-Natures*. It represents the polarity or polarizing force of the Powers, and corresponds to the Shaktis (powers or female aspects) of Hindu mythology. These twin aspects correspond to Mind and Soul, and are explained by Taylor in a note on Hymn IX addressed to the Moon:²

Ficinus, *On the Theology of Plato*,³ has the following remarkable passage, most probably derived from some MS. Commentary of Proclus, or some other of the latter Platonists; for unfortunately he does not acquaint us with the source of his information. [It was evidently the same as that from which Cornelius Agrippa drew his information;⁴]

The professors of the Orphic theology consider a twofold power in souls, and in the celestial orbs; the one consisting in knowledge, the other in vivifying and governing the orb with which that power is connected. Thus in the orb of the earth, they call the gnostic power Pluto, but the other Proserpine. In water they denominate the former power Ocean, and the latter Tethys. In air, that thundering Jove, and this Juno. In fire, that Phanēs, and this Aurora. In the soul of the lunar sphere, they call the gnostic power Liknitan Bacchus, the other Thalia. In the sphere of Mercury, that Bacchus Silenus, this Euterpe. In the orb of Venus, that Lysius Bacchus, this Erato. In the sphere of the Sun, that Trietericus Bacchus, this Melpomene. In the orb of Mars, that Bassareus Bacchus, this Clio. In the sphere of Jupiter, that Sebazius, this Terpsichore. In the orb of Saturn, that Amphietus, this Polymnia. In the eighth sphere, that Pericionius, this Urania. But in the soul of the world they call the gnostic power Bacchus Eribromius, but the animating power Calliope. From all which the Orphic theologians infer, that the particular epithets of Bacchus are compared with those of the Muses, for the purpose of informing us that the powers of the Muses are, as it were, intoxicated with the nectar of divine knowledge; and in order that we may consider the nine Muses, and nine Bacchuses, revolving round one Apollo, that is about the splendour of one invisible Sun.

Muses are intoxicated with the nectar of divine knowledge. They dance around Apollo, the splendour of one Invisible Sun.

The greater part of this passage is preserved by Gyraldus in his *Syntagma de Musis*, and by Natales Comes in his *Mythology*, but without mentioning the original author. As in each of the celestial spheres, therefore, the soul of the

¹ Śakti is the crown of the Astral Light combining in itself all the powers of nature. Brahmā is the germ, and śakti the power or energy that comes into existence at their union or contact. Cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE SEVENFOLD PRINCIPLE IN MAN) III, p. 405 & fn. — ED. PHIL.

² *Myst. Hymns*, pp. 26, 27

³ iv.128

⁴ See Chapter III, “*The Opinions of the Kabalists*”

ruling deity is of the female, and the intellect is of the male characteristic, it is by no means wonderful that the Moon is called in this hymn “female and male.”

The above information is of exceeding great interest as will be seen by casting the eye over the table [below]:

Table of the Elements and Spheres with theirs gods and shaktis

APOLLO

The Splendour of the One Invisible Sun

Elements	Spheres	Bacchi	Muses
Inerratic Sphere [Reflection of Empyrean]	Soul of the World	Eribromius	Calliope
	Eighth Sphere	Pericionius	Urania
Planetary Spheres [Reflection of Ethereal]	Saturnine	Amphietus	Polymnia
	Jovian	Sebasius	Terpsichore
	Martial	Bassareus	Clio
	Solar	Trietericus	Melpomene
	Venereal	Lysius	Erato
	Mercurial	Silenus	Euterpe
	Lunar	Liknites	Thalia
<i>Sublunary</i>			
Fiery		Phanēs	Aurora
Aëry		Jove	Juno
Watery		Ocean	Tethys
Earthly		Pluto	Proserpine

Muses are the powers of remembrance of spiritual knowledge enjoyed by the soul in past births.

Now, who were the Muses? Their numbers are given variously as three, seven, and nine. They are generally said to be the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, Remembrance, or Memory;¹ whereas others call them the daughters of Uranus, Heaven, and Gæa, Earth.² That is to say, that the Muses were the powers of remembrance or reminiscence of knowledge previously enjoyed by the soul in past births. Thus they were called Mneiæ) Remembrances.³ They were also said to be daughters of Uranus and Gæa, for such knowledge or experience can only be obtained by Heaven and Earth “kissing each other,” that is by reincarnation. They are always connected with Apollo, the God of inspiration, who holds in his hand the seven-stringed lyre over each of the

¹ Hes., *Theog.*, 52., etc., 915; Hom., *Il.*, ii.491, *Od.*, i.10; Apollod., i.3, § I

² *Schol. ad Pind. Nem.*, iii.16; Paus., ix.29, § 2; Diod., iv.7; Arnob., *Adv. Gent.*, iii.37

³ Plat. *Sympos.*, ix.14

strings of which one of the Muses presides. Thus Apollo is called the Leader of the Choir of the Muses — *Μουσαγετης*.¹

The rôles commonly assigned to these are as follows:

- 1 Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry;
- 2 Clio, the Muse of history;
- 3 Euterpe, the Muse of lyric poetry;
- 4 Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy;
- 5 Terpsichore, the Muse of choral dance and song;
- 6 Erato, the Muse of amatory poetry;
- 7 Polymnia or Polyhymnia, the Muse of the sublime hymn;
- 8 Urania, the Muse of astronomy;
- 9 Thalia, the Muse of comedy.

Muses are the beneficent use of awakened spiritual powers.

Sirens are the allurements of opened psychic powers.

It is curious to remark the legend which tells us that the Sirens, having ventured upon a contest of song with the nine sisters, were deprived of the feathers of their wings, which the Muses subsequently wore as an ornament.² This reminds us of the contest of the Devas and Asuras over the senses, in the Upanishads. The Asuras “pierced” each of the senses with “imperfection,” so that a man when he sees, sees both pleasant and unpleasant things, *etc.* The Sirens are the allurements of the opened psychic senses, the Muses are the beneficent and healthy use of the same powers. It is, therefore, not surprising to hear that Orpheus was son of Calliope, for Calliope is the Shakti of the World-Soul, and Orpheus was, therefore, fully illumined by the greatest of the Muses.

The name Muse (*μουσα; μαουσα* from *μαειν*, to “strive after,” *etc.*,³) is referred to the emotion or passion, the “fine frenzy,” implied in the verb in the usual sense “strive after” (*μεμαως*, excited), and in its derivatives, among which are counted *μαινεσθαι*, be in a frenzy, *μανια*, frenzy, madness, *μαντις*, a seer, prophet, *etc.*⁴ We prefer the word “inspiration” instead of “frenzy” and “madness”; the seers, prophets, poets, sages, and philosophers, and great geniuses of the world, are not “mad” except for materialists and “degenerates” as Max Nordau.

Nor should it surprise the reader to find Phanēs located among the material Orbs or Spheres. This Phanēs is the manifested material light, which has Aurora, the Dawn,

¹ Diod., i.18

² Eustath., *ad Hom.*, p. 85; Hirt, *Mythol. Bilderb.*, p. 203 *et seq.*

³ Cf. “As for the Muses and music and poetry in general, they seem to have derived their name from their eager desire (*μωσθαι*) to investigate and do philosophy.” Plato: *Cratylus*, 406a; *tr.* Reeve. [*Μωσα* is Doric for *Μουσα*, Æolic. *Μωσις* (*μωμαι*) means searching. (Cornutus, *de Natura Deorum*, 28) *Μουσηκη* is any art over which the Muses presided. (Liddell & Scott) — ED. PHIL.]

⁴ *The Century Dictionary*, *sub voc.*

for spouse, and not the invisible Phanēs, noëtic or “intelligible” Light, which has Night for consort.¹



¹ From Mead G.R.S. *Orpheus: The Theosophy of the Greeks*. London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896; Part VI, Cosmogonical details, pp. 137-43; [text typographically enhanced by Philaletheians UK]

Helena Blavatsky explains how inferior goddesses emanate from superior deities

If the reader turns to Webster's *Dictionary* he will find therein a curious explanation of the words "lymphatic" and "lymph." Etymologists think that the Latin word *lymp̄ha* is derived from the Greek *nymphē*, "a nymph or inferior Goddess," they say.

The Muses were sometimes called *nymphs* by the poets. Hence [according to Webster] all persons in a state of rapture, as seers, poets, madmen, *etc.*, were said to be caught by the nymphs (*νυμφοληπτοι*).

The Goddess of Moisture (the Greek and Latin *nymph* or *lymph*, then) is fabled in India as being born from the pores of one of the Gods, whether the Ocean God, Varuna, or a minor "River God" is left to the particular sect and fancy of the believers. But the main question is, that the ancient Greeks and Latins are thus admittedly known to have shared in the same "superstitions" as the Hindus. This superstition is shown in their maintaining to this day that every atom of matter in the four (or five) Elements is an emanation from an inferior God or Goddess, himself or herself an earlier emanation from a superior deity; and, moreover, that each of these atoms — being Brahmā, one of whose names is *Anu*, or atom — no sooner is it emanated than it *becomes endowed with consciousness*, each of its kind, and free will, acting within the limits of law. Now, he who knows that the *Kosmic Trimūrti* (trinity) composed of Brahmā, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Śiva, the Destroyer, is a most magnificent and scientific symbol of the *material* Universe and its gradual evolution; and who finds a proof of this, in the etymology of the names of these deities,¹ plus the doctrines of *Gupta Vidyā*, or esoteric knowledge — knows also how to correctly understand this "superstition." The five fundamental titles of Vishnu — added to that of *Anu* (atom) common to all the trimūrtic personages — which are, *Bhūtātman*, one with the created or emanated materials of the world; *Pradhānātman*, "one with the senses"; *Paramātman*, "Supreme"; and *Ātman*, Kosmic Soul, or the Universal Mind — show sufficiently what the ancient Hindus meant by endowing with mind and consciousness every atom and giving it a distinct name of a God or a Goddess. Place their Pantheon, composed of 30 crores (or 300 millions) of deities within the macrocosm (the Universe), or inside the microcosm (man), and the number will not be found overrated, since they relate to the atoms, cells, and molecules of everything that is.

This, no doubt, is too poetical and abstruse for our generation, but it seems decidedly as scientific, if not more so, than the teachings derived from the latest discoveries of Physiology and Natural History.²

¹ Brahmā comes from the root *brih*, "to expand," "to scatter"; *Vishnu* from the root *vi* or *viś* (phonetically), "to enter into," "to pervade" the universe of matter. As to Śiva — the patron of the Yogis, the etymology of his name would remain *incomprehensible* to the casual reader.

² From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (KOSMIC MIND) XII pp. 148-50