

The Muses and Their Afterlife in Post-Classical Europe. Kathleen W. Christian, Clare E. L. Guest, and Claudia Wedepohl, eds.
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This volume contains papers from a conference on the Muses at the Warburg Institute in 2009; it deals with some of the many avenues of research on this vast subject, with essays on literature, philosophy, art, and music. Plato established a shrine to the Muses in the Academy precinct, and John Dillon suggests that he intended to promote the idea that philosophical inquiry was their greatest gift. In *Laws* and *Phaedrus* Plato presents them as patrons of education and of order, in both individual and state, a view that lasted until the Hellenistic period. Filling out the classical picture, Penelope Murray's comprehensive article tracks evidence for variations in the number, functions, and appearance of the Muses, from Hesiod onward. She stresses their continuing broad role as patrons of learning, education, and culture, just as in the classical period they were not viewed as personifications of specific arts or genres.

Perceptions of the Muses changed in late antiquity and the early Christian period. Their rejection by writers of these times is described by Karin Schlapbach; but Peter Dronke considers Muses in medieval Latin poetry from a quite different viewpoint. Rather than emphasize their rejection, he shows how several poets gave them a role in the Christian cosmos, and the rich vein of playfulness in medieval Latin poetry gives him ample instances of comic moments. In “The Multiplicity of the Muses,” Kathleen Christian examines how the Muses were visualized in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, showing that the ancient problems of establishing their identities, attributes, and functions persisted throughout the Renaissance. Roman sarcophagi decorated with reliefs of the Muses that were reused for early Christian burials typified the conflation of pagan and Christian mythology, which was continued in the decoration of the Tempio Malatestiano and the Tarocchi. The Muses also provided opportunities for painters to honor and flatter their noble patrons, and the ruler is frequently depicted as Apollo Musagetes, founder of a new Parnassus, with the Arts (Muses) under his direction.

The progress of the Muses north of the Alps is followed by Ulrich Pfisterer, who identifies the German Muses in art and literature, while Brigitte van Wymeersch examines their role in French music. In sixteenth-century France, theoretician Pontus de Tyard considered the Muses a source of poetic and musical inspiration, echoing Platonic ideas of the importance of their gifts for the correct balance in the soul. Poets Ronsard and De Baïf shared his views that the poet-musician was dependent on the gods and the Muses for his artistic inspiration. However, the following century saw a change in theoretical attitudes, and the notion of divine inspiration was rejected in favor of scientific, technical explanations of music that put the artist in complete control of his art. Mersenne was a leader in this movement, which saw the Muses reduced to a mere allegory for music. In Italy, too, the decline of the Muses was associated with the move toward more theoretical discussion of the arts, as evidenced by Clare Guest’s description of the diminishing nature of the poet-Muse relationship from the late sixteenth century on. Here too, with the rejection of their inspirational role, the Muses were seen as allegories or “empty figures of speech” (191).

If the Muses symbolized culture, then their mother Mnemosyne stood for the process of transmission of human cultural activities — their afterlife. Claudia Wedepohl plots Aby Warburg’s thinking on such aspects of classical myth through his wide-ranging engagement with (especially) nineteenth-century thinking on the anthropological and psychological dimensions of myth. The *Bilderatlas* panels with the Muses and Apollo as subject form the starting point for her in-depth examination.

Although varied disciplines here contribute their views of the Muses, it is intellectually satisfying to see how often they converge. Murray and Christian both stress the variable nature of artists’ perceptions of the Muses in literature, art, and music; Dillon and Wedepohl highlight their contribution to philosophical, psychological, and cosmological inquiry; Guest and Van Wymeersch analyze the diminished role of the Muses in the late Renaissance. This convergence generates a unity in a volume made up of so many different strands of research. A possible problem for the volume is the erratic

policy on translation of sources in foreign languages: some authors translate; others do not; others roughly paraphrase; so readership of those who are explorers rather than experts in the field could be limited.

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