

MUSES AND THE GENDER OF INSPIRATION

Tomasz Mojsik

Assist. Prof. Dr., University of Białystok, The Institute of History, Plac
Uniwersytecki 1, 15-420 Białystok, E-mail: tmojsik@uwb.edu.pl

In Greek mythology, the Muses¹ are a sisterhood of goddesses, their number set at nine by Classical and Hellenistic times, who embody the arts and inspire the creation process with their graces through remembered and improvised song and stage, writing, traditional music, and dance. According to Hesiod's *Theogony* (VII century BC), they are the daughters of Zeus, king of the gods, and Mnemosyne, goddess of memory. The canonical nine Muses with their fields of patronage - although established only probably in Hellenistic or even Roman times - are:

- **Calliope** (the 'beautiful of speech'): chief of the muses and muse of epic or heroic poetry
- **Clio** (the 'glorious one'): muse of history
- **Erato** (the 'amorous one'): muse of love or erotic poetry, lyrics, and marriage songs
- **Euterpe** (the 'well-pleasing'): muse of music and lyric poetry
- **Melpomene** (the 'chanting one'): muse of tragedy
- **Polyhymnia** or **Polymnia** (the '[singer] of many hymns'): muse of sacred song, oratory, lyric, singing and rhetoric
- **Terpsichore** (the '[one who] delights in dance'): muse of choral song and dance
- **Thalia** (the 'blossoming one'): muse of comedy and bucolic poetry
- **Urania** (the 'celestial one'): muse of astronomy

Famous are the beginnings of the *Iliad*:

The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles,

that destructive wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans,

and sent forth to Hades many valiant souls of heroes,

and made them themselves spoil for dogs and every bird;

¹ Generally about the Muses: M. Mayer, *Musen*, (w:) *Paulys Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. G. Wissowa et alii, t. 16.1, Stuttgart 1933, col. 680-757; P. Boyancé, *Le culte des muses chez les philosophes Grecs. Études d'histoire et de psychologie religieuses*, Paris 1937; W. Otto *Die Musen und der göttliche Ursprung des Singens und Sagens*, Darmstadt 1955; E. Barmeyer, *Die Musen. Ein Beitrag zur Inspirationstheorie*, München 1968; Ch. Walde, *Musen*, (w:) *Der Neue Pauly*, ed. H. Cancik, H. Schneider, vol. 8, Stuttgart 2000, 511-514.

*thus the plan of Zeus came to fulfillment, from the time when first
they parted in strife Atreus' son, king of men, and brilliant Achilles.*

[Homer *Il.* 1.1-7 (transl. by A.T. Murray, 1924)];

and *Odyssey*:

*Sing to me of the man, **Muse**, the man of twists and turns*

driven time and again off course, once he had plundered

the hallowed heights of Troy. [Homer *Od.* 1.1-3 (transl. by R. Fagles, 1996)];

where the Muses are invoked to help in singing and narrate the story.

In modern language Muses are still alive in the words *music* and *museum*. The term music is derived from Greek word *mousikē*, which in antiquity have meaning of a *union of song, dance and word, to which the Muses gave their name. Mousike, the realm of the Muses* - as Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson write- *lies at the very heart of Greek culture, and is indeed a contender for the closest term in Greek to our (polymorphous) 'culture'*². Modern word **music** has narrower meaning but still have to do with composing and performing, and therefore also with inspiration.

Well known institution of **museum** is connected with the cult of the Muses in the schools since the 5th century and later especially in Platon's Academy and in the Mouseion par excellence - the **Musaeum** at Alexandria. This last institution - founded by Ptolemy II Philadelphus at ancient Alexandria in Egypt and supported by the patronage of the royal family of the Ptolemies - included the famous Library of Alexandria, a rooms devoted, for example, to the study of anatomy and an installation for astronomical observations, and first of all brought together the best scholars of the Hellenistic world.

In the next part of this paper I will examine two complementary research ideas 1. inspiration of gender studies³ as far as the research into metatextual statements⁴ of

² *Music and the Muses: The Culture of Mousike in the Classical Athenian City*, ed. P. Murray, P. Wilson, Oxford 2004, 1.

³ Gender refers to the differences between men and women. *Encyclopædia Britannica* notes that gender identity is *an individual's self-conception as being male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex*. Although gender is commonly used interchangeably with sex, within the social sciences it often refers to specifically social differences, known as gender roles in the biological sciences. Historically, feminism has posited that many gender roles are socially constructed, and lack a clear biological explanation. People whose gender identity feels incongruent with their physical bodies may call themselves transgender or genderqueer - see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender>.

⁴ About metatext see G. Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, Lincoln and London 1987, 51 (quoted in: A. Nünning, *On Metanarrative: Towards a Definition, a Typology and an Outline of the Functions of*

poets is concerned, and 2. the question of the gender of inspiration. The latter aims at defining the position and function of the elements of cultural gender in poet's statements, his contacts with the Muses, poetic initiation scenes (scenes of *Dichterweihe*) and *poetologische Bildersprache*⁵.

Let the starting point of our reflections be the issue of the gender - sex as a cultural and social construct - of the Muses and the reason why poets treat female Muses as the source of divine inspiration; why poets, whose work to a large extent functions in male circles or expresses the elements of male ideology, refer to female personages as a guarantee of the quality and authenticity of their statements? Why should the reflection of social subordination authorize the statements of representatives of the domineering group?

After all, the image of divine singers conflicts with the social reality. Even though women do appear in public as dancers or singers, they can only perform in groups and in compliance with strict regulations⁶. There is no room for them during symposium (male banquets) – exceptions only prove the rule - during musical competitions or among travelling songsters⁷. The reason for the last is that female mobility remains socially unacceptable. The only poetic compositions publicly performed by women, usually as part of a ritual, are those created by men⁸. It is also up to men to construct their public "voice" and to transform it as they wish. In her book *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece* Eva Stehle presents the way the paradox of the maiden choral performance as authorized public speech by a group whose gender should exclude them from such speech functions in Alcman's *Louvre Partheneion*⁹. Among the necessary measures is the performer's denial of their own sexual attractiveness.

On the other hand, the image of a girlish chorus known to the Greeks from their social reality must have a lot in common with the Muses. This is due to the fact that the Muses are presented as virgins (*parthenoi/korai*) of the same age, attached to their father and his house¹⁰, as well as to collectivity and lack of clear differentiation between members of the group (calling for only one Muse by her name does not happen until much later and is quite rare). A common name which, as is the case with female choirs, links them with a specific place – e.g. *Pierides*, *Olympiades*,

Metanarrative Commentary (w:) *The Dynamics of Narrative Form. Studies in Anglo-American Narratology*, ed. J. Pier, Berlin, N.Y. 2004, 11-57); *metanarrative: About narrative; describing narrative. A narrative having (a) narrative as (one) of its topic(s) is (a) metanarrative. More specifically, a narrative referring to itself and to those elements by which it is constituted and communicated, a narrative discussing itself, a self-reflexive narrative, is metanarrative.*

⁵ See R. Nünlist, *Poetologische Bildersprache in der frühgriechische Dichtung*, Stuttgart 1998.

⁶ About social position of women see *Making Silence Speak. Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, ed. A. Lardinois, L. McClure, Princeton 2001; N. Loraux, *The Experiences of Tiresias. The Feminine and the Greek Man*, Princeton 1995.

⁷ About symposium see *Sympotica: A Symposium on the Symposium*, ed. O. Murray, Oxford 1990.

⁸ See for example Alcman fr. 1 - *Greek Lyric*, vol. II, ed&transl. D.A. Campbell, Cambridge Mass. 1988.

⁹ E. Stehle, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece. Nondramatic Poetry in its Setting*, Princeton 1997

¹⁰ See Hesiod, *Theogony*, 1-104.

*Helikoniades*¹¹. Claude Calame in his book *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece* claims¹² that suffixes *-id*, *-ad* are characteristic of the female sphere and are connected with submission and belonging (whether geographical or to a family) – see for example *Menads*, *Dryads*, *Orestiads* etc. Another form of subordination is using terms referring to family relationships (family association). In fact, groups of goddesses are called daughters of Nereus or Zeus. Besides, the Muses are often named *thygattes*, *korai*, *paides*, *parthenoi* or *tekna* of Zeus (and Mnemosyne). What is important is that most of the time they are clearly connected with Zeus, rather than with Mnemosyne, whose appearance in literary work is incidental (which is quite the opposite in the case of vase ornamentation)¹³. This phenomenon is particularly visible in the archaic period – for example in Homer's work the Muses are solely the daughters of Zeus. The image, though it does not include all the possibilities, is more or less the one presented by Lillian Doherty - *virtually sexless, no husbands or lovers, closely linked to their father's house (Hes. Th. 36-74)*¹⁴. Even though the Muses are presented as mothers in some later texts, their maturity is in most cases temporary and socially impermanent. In *Rhesos* the Muse seduced by the god of the River Strimon says: *I felt shame before my sisters because I was unwed*¹⁵ - and throws her child into the river in order to give it back to its father. This image reinforces the fact of impersonality and anonymity of the Muses – this could be any of them. Besides, the word *partheneia* being the reason for shame before sisters can also mean virginity, obviously lost. Which in turn suggests that, similarly as is the case with Rhesos' mother behaviour, this is a natural state for a Muse. Obviously they are not always virgins¹⁶, but as mothers they are not attached to either any man or their children. The idea of being a descendant of a Muse may constitute an alternative for initiation scenes. Or rather the scenes of meetings with the Muses are a "human" version of close ties with the deities of legendary bards, such as Orpheus, Mousaios etc. Describing Boeotia in his *Description of Greece* (9.29.4) Pausanias says that the Greeks called them simply *children of the Muses* - *Mousōn paides*. Such impersonal form proves that, as was the case with Rhesos, giving a name to a Muse is of secondary importance. Also, the birth of a child does not seem to change much in their life – it does not make them move to another place or break up with sisters and father.

Another problem is the discrepancy between the patrilinearity in descriptions of the Muses, who are the daughters of their father par excellence, and the matrilinearity of poets who are the children of no matter which Muse. It is interesting that in Hesiod's *Theogony* (as in the *Catalogue of Women*), which in our

¹¹ See names such *Deliades*, *Lesbiades* used in cult rituals.

¹² C. Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece. Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Function*, transl. D. Collins, J. Orion, Lanham 1997, 30-33.

¹³ About Mnemosyne see J. A. Notopoulos, "Mnemosyne in Oral Literature", *TAPhA* 69 (1938), s. 465-493; B. Snell, "Mnemosyne in der frühgriechischen Dichtung", *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* B. 9 (1964), 19-21.

¹⁴ L. E. Doherty, *Siren Song Gender, Audiences, and Narrators in the "Odyssey"*, Ann Arbor 1995, 84.

¹⁵ Euripides, *Bacchae*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Rhesus*, ed. & transl. D. Kovacs, Cambridge 2002.

¹⁶ See E. Stehle, *Performance and Gender*, 205, n. 115; Pindar fr. 128c 5; Plato *Republica* 364e; R. Harriot, *Poetry and Criticism Before Plato*, London 1969, chapter 1.

case constitutes the fundamental source, genealogies are basically matrilinear¹⁷. Such incompleteness, ambiguousness and liminality of the Muses from the social point of view are quite significant. They are neither fully wives, nor mothers, or virgins; on the one hand ready to get married, but on the other forever tied with their father and his house – permanently on the border and in between. From time to time it is possible to distinguish one from the others, but in most cases they act and are perceived as a group. And poets only seem to be on the other side of the picture. As it was shown by Victor Turner on the basis of ethnographic material *sexlessness and anonymity are highly characteristic of liminality (or communitas as opposite to the structured society)*. And *matrilinearity, too, represents, in the dimension of kinship, the notion of communities, which are the characteristics of a group in a liminal state*¹⁸. This suggests that both the Muses and poets reveal certain features of liminal beings, from the social point of view. If we juxtapose it with our knowledge of travelling, and often anonymous, bards, rhapsodes or poets, moving, whether out of choice or necessity, between communities and not attached to any of them, associated in schools or other organizations (*Homeridai, Kreophyleioi*)¹⁹, or with an image of the Muses moving in liminal places, like mountains, sources or meadows, speaking or singing in public and possessing knowledge normally reserved for men only – then in such context the whole thing becomes more obvious.

All the same, the Muses play another role, too – they are not only liminal beings, but also beings which can be met in liminal time and space. This is in order to obtain knowledge and skills necessary for the initiand/initiated to achieve a new status. Categories typical for the rites of passage seem to be the best way to describe the scenes of encounters with the Muses and other divinities serving similar functions as the Muses (for example the gift of speech). To the renowned scene from prooimion of Hesiod's *Theogony* (1-2, 22-34):

From the Heliconian Muses let us begin to sing, who hold the great and holy mount of Helicon, (...) And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon, and this word first the goddesses said to me the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis: "Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things." So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvellous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things that were aforetime; and they bade me sing of the race of the blessed gods that are eternally, but ever to sing of themselves both first and last. [transl. by H. G. Evelyn-White]

we can add:

¹⁷ Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. & comm. M. L. West, Oxford 1966, 34-35.

¹⁸ V. Turner, *Liminality and Communitas* (in:) *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, London 1969, 94-130.

¹⁹ See R. Thomas, *The Place of the Poet in Archaic Society* (in:) *The Greek World*, ed. by A. Powell, London 1995, 104-129.

1. a 3rd century or even older description of Archilochus' encounter with the Muses, which ends with an exchange of a cow for a lyre²⁰;

2. a description of Hipponax' encounter with Iambe, which might be a parody of an initiation scene²¹;

3. a description of Aesop's encounter of with the Muses (and Isis) in a dream in the *Life of Aesop* (esp. § 4-8)²²;

4. a description of Epimenides' encounter of with gods (among others Dike and Aletheia) in his dream, in a cave²³;

In all the aforementioned descriptions, some elements characteristic of the rites of passage²⁴ are repeated:

a) the meeting takes place in a solitary place, on the outer edges of the inhabited world – meadows, mountains, seashore, caves;

b) the time when the encounter takes place is also extraordinary and liminal: noon, moonlit night or dream;

c) the person who meets gods is young, immature, vague, positioned somewhere between the world of civilization and nature - like in the case of the shepherd. As Marilyn Arthur said, Hesiod's phrase - *poimenes agrauloi* / *shepherds of the wilderness* (*Theogony* 26) - has as its referent the horizontal opposition between the city and the wild and the vertical opposition between gods and men; thus *poimenes agrauloi* are located at the point of conjunction between the two systems – geographical and ontological²⁵.

d) the encountered beings are ambivalent and liminal - Hesiod's Muses announce a capacity for speaking 'the truth, or falsehood similar to the truth', Archilochus' Muses are also not what they seem; sex, time and place of the encounter may be contradictory to the social experience (connected with a woman's "normal" behaviour) of the initiand (and the recipients/audience of the original poem, in which the encounter is described);

²⁰ See D. Clay, *Archilochos Heros: The Cult of Poets in the Greek Polis*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2004.

²¹ Choiboskos, in Hephaisition 3.1 = Hipponax test. 21 Degani = 183 Gerber; see R. Rosen, "A Poetic Initiation Scene in Hipponax?", *AJP* 109.2 (1988), 174-179; Ch. G. Brown, "Hipponax and Iambe", *Hermes* 116.4 (1988), 478-481; R. L. Fowler, "Two More New Verses of Hipponax (and a Spurious of Philoxenus)?", *ICS* 15 (1990), 1-22.

²² *Aesopica*, vol. 1, ed. B.E. Perry, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952; J. Dillery, "Aesop, Isis, and the Heliconian Muses", *CP* 94 (1999), 268-280.

²³ *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels, W. Kranz, Zürich 1966¹², t. 1, 1 A1 + B1.

²⁴ See A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, transl. M. Vizedom, G. L. Caffee, Chicago 1960.

²⁵ M. B. Arthur, "The Dream of a World without Women: Poetics and the Circles of Order in the "Theogony" Prooemium", *Arethusa* 16.1-2 (1983), 97-116.

e) the encounter may lead to humiliation and physiological changes in the initiand (initiated) - as in the case of Hesiod (*Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies*), Epimenides (*Cretans always liars, animals, wild bellies* – this fragment is believed to come from the prooimion of Epimenides' *Theogony*) or Hipponax;

f) the result of the encounter is that the initiated obtains knowledge and skills he did not possess before, which in turn changes his status;

g) the initiated can also be given an object which would be a visible sign of his new status – a rabdos, an instrument;

Humiliation can be physiological, too - for example blindness (whose symbolic meaning is close to death), like in the case of Demodokos, Thamyris (in some versions), perhaps Homeros, the man from Chios, (or Stesichoros, who perhaps plays with the motive), lameness – like in other versions of the account of Thamyris - or a state of oblivion (playing on instruments or stories) as a reversal of the initiation gesture²⁶. To this list we can add prophets like Teiresias (blindness and change of sex), Phineus, Phormion, or the prophets of the Old Testament.

All gestures and words lead the initiated through his symbolic death to (another) birth as a poet, bard, a person bestowed with the gift of speech, an ability to play a musical instrument, a collection of (real) stories from the past and knowledge of the future. The bard may have gone through another initiation, e.g. at school, in a group of other bards, or at his master's side, and it was only later that the tale freed itself of gestures, and the master was replaced by the Muses.

The poet's initiation can be juxtaposed with other phenomena which we know from different areas of culture. Firstly with descriptions of shamanistic experiences and with assistant figures from folk-tales were analyzed by Vladimir Propp²⁷. Malcolm Davies, when writing about the story-pattern inherent in the Judgment of Paris, identifies the three goddesses that Paris meets - with these ambivalent figures²⁸. And we can add here more examples of heroes who turn a new leaf in their life after a meeting with a god - for example Jazon, Heracles, Perseus. This type of meeting, both in a myth and in a tale, has a structure almost identical to that of a meeting with the Muses. Besides, Malcolm Davies concludes his article with a statement that like the three goddesses of the Judgment, the Muses can be assimilated with the female assistant figures beloved by the folk-tales²⁹.

To make the picture complete we have yet to explain the reasons why poets refer to female Muses as a source of divine inspiration and to ask what the purpose of

²⁶ See D. Steiner, "Stoning and Sight: Structural Equivalence in Greek Mythology", *Classical Antiquity* 14 (1995), 193-211.

²⁷ V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, transl. L. Scott, University of Texas Press 1968.

²⁸ M. Davies, "The Judgements of Paris and Solomon", *CQ* 53.1 (2003), 32-43.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 43.

describing meetings with Muses in literary work is. Undoubtedly they constitute metapoetical statements, an element of metapoetical discourse. The problem is, however, what does the poet want to achieve through giving an account of such a meeting? What information for the recipients is conveyed in these metapoetical statements?

We can suggest the following answer to the first question:

1. language and speech have features which men ascribe to the female sphere:

a) ambiguity, double speech - simultaneous capacity for truth and the imitation of truth, that characterizes the language attributed to the female³⁰;

b) imitating, mimesis is a skill said to be possessed by women - cf. *Deliaides*, Helen, Prokne and the metaphors of weaving;

c) deceptiveness, like in the descriptions of Pandora, beautiful on the outside, but deceptive and deceitful in the inside³¹;

d) descriptions how speech and tale work and how they influence the recipient assimilate them to the descriptions of Eros' actions.

2. The female world, the chthonic world of nature, is associated with knowledge – which might be the reason for some alternative genealogies of the Muses suggesting that they descend from Ouranos and Gaia.

3. The previous issue is connected with what Victor Turner in his book *Ritual Process* called *the powers of the weak - permanently or transiently sacred attributes of low status or position*. Turner, referring to various social phenomena - hippies, millenarian movements, court jesters, or mysterious strangers – presented how *subjugated persons or groups can simultaneously achieve mystical and moral powers, as secular weakness can be sacred power*.

This theoretical category derived from anthropological research enables us to at least partly understand why, in a society dominated by men, it is acceptable to refer to the female sphere as something valuable and having some sort of social power. It is a different story that in such situation, as Lilian Doherty put it, *female power in fact serves to reinforce a male-dominated gender system*³².

As far as the other question is concerned, each reference to the Muses or their presence or a contact with them presupposes, as is the case with a hymn,

³⁰See A. L. T. Bergren, "Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought", *Arethusa* 16.1-2 (1983), 69-95.

³¹See L. E. Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, London 2001.

³²L. E. Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation*, 88.

simultaneous existence of two communicative settings. Like in a hymn, we have here internal communication addressed by the (worshipping) mortal(s) to a god, and external communication between the poet and/or the performers and the audience/society³³. This means that the image of the Muses depends on the communicative setting which influences the interpretation. It is true to say that communication with the audience/society is much more important for us because it enables us to go back to the roots of metapoetical discourse. It seems that if the messages concerning the poet and his status, as well as the status and functioning of poetry and the functions of the Muses, are to be understood by the audience, which makes the metapoetic discourse effective, a poet should use a language comprehensible to the audience/society.

Thus, the image of a meeting with the Muses has to originate from a need to refer to the symbols the society knows from their own practices, a common code, a way to interpret experiences. In such a situation a poet uses what might be called a language of social communication – he communicates (creates) the change in his status through referring to gestures interpreted as determining shifts in social hierarchy. Leslie Kurke wrote in a similar context that - *poet's imagery was culturally grounded and meaningful to his audience*³⁴. Which means that the purpose of a meeting with the Muses is to create/change the poet's status, as is the case with the rites of passage.

The image of poetic initiation distinguishes a poet from common people, those who have not received a gift from the Muses or other gods (= those who (most probably) will not go through the rite) and from other poets (= those who did not (or not yet) go through initiation). Besides, the description of a rite ascribes to him certain features which make him different from the other members of the society – ability to play a musical instrument, voice, the gift of speech, and most importantly knowledge of the past, and prestige which enables him to talk about the past with authority, and (to comment) on the present and the future. A feeling of distinctness is probably strengthened by other elements, too, such as clothes, mobility (a poet is often a “stranger”), physical handicaps (blindness, etc.), the place occupied in space during recitation, or the achieved gifts or rewards.

Both the initiation scenes and the whole metapoetical discourse are due to the need for differentiation, distinguishing a poet from the rest of the society, and at the same time constitute a proof of difference and a result of (creative) reflection on it. The aim of differentiation is also to shape the image (and the status) of a poet, to create him as a social being through symbolic gestures – since a poet has to establish his position in the society, e.g. to create it in a symbolic way. Pierre Bourdieu, who prefers to call rites of passage - *rites of institution: these rites tend to consecrate or legitimate an “arbitrary boundary”*³⁵. *Their symbolic efficacy consists in that they*

³³ J. Danielewicz, *Morfologia hymnu antycznego*, Poznań 1976, 119.

³⁴ L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise*, London 1991, 11.

³⁵ P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. J. B. Thompson, transl. G. Raymond, M. Adamson, Oxford 1991, 117-126.

possess a power to act on reality by acting on its representation. The process of investiture, for example, exercises a symbolic efficacy that is quite real in that it really transforms the person consecrated: first, because it transforms the representations others have of him and above all the behaviour they adopt towards him (...); and second, because it simultaneously transforms the representation that the invested person has of himself, and the behaviour he feels obliged to adopt in order to conform to that representation³⁶.

In relation to the above reflections, as well as to the analyses of Leslie Kurke, who, based on other works of Pierre Bourdieu, investigated epinikion as marketplace for negotiation of symbolic capital³⁷ – we could well say that metapoetical discourse is to a large extent a field to negotiate the status of a poet in the society. And one's own, characteristic meta-language, apart from (self)reflection gives also - social power and ideological control.

The place of the Muses as females in this discourse is not accidental and carries with itself many meaningful messages. All this makes the question of the role of gender in this discourse very important.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of *Bildersprache*, which oscillates between male and female imagery. Between weaving or *Textilverarbeitung*, the alimentary and sexual codes, picking flowers etc. and typical male imagery connected with civilising, cultivation, ploughing, taking care of a garden or a field³⁸. Sometimes we come across alternating roles, like in Hesiod's *Theogony* (31-32) - *enepneusan de moi auden / thespin* – where, according to Ann Bergren Muses are "male" inseminators of aude 'speech' into the "female" poet³⁹.

On the opposite pole we may place associating – probably since the 5th century – poetry as a gift from the Muses with effeminacy and a style of life unworthy of a man. Hippomedon in Euripides *Supplices* (883) talks about *Muses' pleasures* as an opposition to active lifestyle connected with horses and hunting. Similar are the implications of the discussion between Amphion and Dzetos in Euripides' *Antiope*.

The female zone, which in case of Sirens is even more visible than in the Muses, is also associated with a deadly danger of lack of borders, vagueness, over completeness, which threatens to overwhelm an individual poem. Complete, divine knowledge of these goddesses must be stopped, some voices must be excluded, to let a text reach its end...

³⁶ Ibidem, .

³⁷ L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise*, 8.

³⁸ See R. Nünlist, *Poetologische Bildersprache in der frühgriechische Dichtung*, Stuttgart 1998.

³⁹ A. L. T. Bergren, "Language and the Female", 183, n. 18.

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