

## CHOOSE YOUR MUSE

By Kristen Painter

Writers talk about their muses all the time. “I can’t stop writing, my muse is with me!” or “If anyone sees my muse, will they tell her I miss her? I really need to finish this manuscript!”

If you’re not writing because you’re stuck in a sagging middle or can’t seem to fill that first blank page with anything that makes you happy, you have probably wished those muses were real. Well, they are. And I’m here to tell you how to find them, keep them and make them work for you.

There are nine muses (according to the Greeks), each with their area of specialty and sources of inspiration.

### **Calliope, the muse of epic poetry.**

First, what is an epic poem? It’s a long narrative poem telling of a hero’s deeds. Thanks, Mr. Webster. Some of the typical elements in an epic include fabulous adventures, superhuman deeds, and majestic language. They are often written in way that uses a wide range of literary devices.

Having said all that, I must now ask you this: How much epic poetry have you read lately? Stop looking at me like I’ve grown a third eye. You mean you haven’t just finished Dante’s *Inferno* for the ninth time? (This would be an appropriate place to announce that I was forced to read it in French, but I won’t.) Homer’s *Odyssey* isn’t currently on your nightstand? Why not?

When is the last time you looked at these ancient stories for inspiration? There are only so many tales to tell, after all. Why not see how they were first told? If you don’t own any epics, I suggest you go buy a few and add them to your reference shelf. I don’t care if it’s *Beowulf* or *Paradise Lost*. Buy the modern English translations to make your life easier. This way Calliope can inspire you and you’ll understand it.

### **Clio, the muse of history.**

I don’t care if you write historicals or not, history is a great, unlimited source of inspiration. What does it have to do with romance, you say? Look at the stories of Antony and Cleopatra, Napoleon and Josephine, and Prince Edward and Wallis Simpson. Getting the picture?

History is full of terrible scandals and fallen empires and traitorous men and women. Perfect stuff for a romance novel of any genre with a little tweaking. And since history always repeats itself, you're bound to write something timely.

In search of a twist to add punch to your story? Let Clio unsag your middle with a burst of old-fashioned inspiration. You can find her at the library in the Reference section. She also moonlights with the rest of the muses at Google.

### **Erato, the muse of love poetry and mimicry.**

The inspiration of love poems doesn't need to be belabored, does it? But what's the value of mimicry? Easy. If you're stuck, pretend you're someone else. Now before you accuse me of suggesting you plagiarize, that is not what I'm doing. However, if you're having trouble with a scene, why not do as Erato would and write it in the style of the author you most enjoy. Go ahead, write that Regency like you're Sherrilyn Kenyon. I dare you.

Mimicry frees us from being ourselves and helps us shed all the doubt that can be the source of our blocks. This is a great exercise for getting a handle on a tricky or difficult scene. Don't do it in hopes of writing something fabulous, though. Do it with the intent of seeing your story with new eyes. That should be enough to get your creative juicing flowing again. You'll soon be back in your own voice and typing like mad.

### **Euterpe, the muse of music.**

Ah, music. Who hasn't been inspired by a song? But if you've been listening to the same three CD's for the last three months, don't expect to keep Euterpe around for long. She likes variety and the occasional taste of the unknown.

Check out Amazon to listen to snippets of albums you're unfamiliar with or if head to the listening station of your favorite music store. You just may find something that blows your mind or becomes the theme song for one of your characters. Maybe a movie score will paint a landscape in your head or a golden oldie will give birth to a new plot line. Anything is possible with music; it has no limits and no boundaries.

Treat yourself to some new music every once in a while and keep your muse happy.

### **Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy.**

Nobody likes bad news, right? Wrong! They love it – as long as they're on the outside looking in. Think about Titanic, Terms of Endearment, and Steel Magnolias – lots of bad news and tons of viewers.

Of course with romance, you must have a Happily Ever After ending. You must. Don't argue with me because I won't listen. However, there is plenty of room for Melpomene to work her tragic magic (is that a fabulous rhyme or what?) at the beginning or in the middle. Tragedy is a great catalyst for storytelling.

Many authors will tell you that the only way to write a great book is to torture your hero and heroine. There you go! Instant tragedy. So if you're stumped, kill someone or kidnap them, sink the ship they're on or crash their car, bankrupt their business or give them a fatal disease. Or do several. It's all good. And it's sure to add some bounce to a sagging storyline.

**Polymnia, the Muse of Sacred Poetry. (Also the Muse of geometry, mime, meditation and agriculture.)**

What's farming and long division got to do with romance? Anyone? Bueller? Beats me. I think with Polymnia, Sacred Poetry is where it's at. For me, sacred poetry would have to be things like Psalms, Proverbs and Song of Solomon. Even if your faith differs, these are beautiful, inspiring reading.

These books are a great way to remind yourself that people have been falling in love since the beginning of time *and* writing about it. What better way to find inspiration than in love poems written by ancient kings?

**Terpsichore, the Muse of dancing.**

I went to Riverdance a few weeks ago and let me tell you, it was inspiring on so many levels. The music, the singing and of course, the amazing dancing. Irish dancing is exceptionally precise. The lead male dancer in the show I saw started dancing when he was three. Now, I've never taken dance classes but that doesn't prevent me from understanding the dedication required of him to reach the point he's at.

I want my writing to dance at that level, don't you? But it's going to take time and effort. Sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we think it should just happen. (And sometimes it does.) But if you're stuck or struggling perhaps it's the right moment to look at how many practice hours you're spending in the studio. When's the last time you read a book on craft or just wrote something for the fun of it? Those count as studio hours. So does reading outside your genre (gasp – you mean there's more to read than romance?). Pick up a classic or reread an old favorite.

This is a business that requires us to pay our dues. Sure, there are a few writers who garnered fabulous success from the first thing they wrote, but there are countless others who struggled and sweated and agonized to get where they are. I can guarantee you those writers have logged many hours with Terpsichore “in the studio”.

**Thalia, the Muse of comedy and playful, idyllic poetry.**

An agent, an editor and a duck walk into a bar...wait. I think I'll save that for later. Comedy is a great thing, isn't it? Do you know anyone who doesn't like to laugh? I don't. And those who know me know I am a cut-up of the highest degree. Make someone laugh, put a smile on their face and they instantly like you. It's true.

But I don't write comedy, you say. Hush, I respond. There's room for levity in every genre. There are light moments in many of the darkest tales. Comedy is real life. People do funny things. (Don't tell me you don't or I'll slap you with a rubber chicken.)

If your scene is blah and uninspired, why not inject it with a little slice of life silliness? Maybe your hero is a straight-laced, no nonsense guy. Perhaps he should run into closed screen door and laugh at himself. This way, the heroine (and the reader) can see he's got a lighter side.

Even if you aren't funny, your characters can be. Try it sometime and see what happens! Thalia may become a permanent fixture – but beware! She tends to leave whoopee cushions in the most inconvenient places.

**Urania, the Muse of astronomy.**

While I don't put any stock in the alignment of stars dictating what happens in my life, the star signs can be a great source of character traits. And if you're stuck in your writing, it's not uncommon to find your characters at the root of the problem. Maybe your hero is a little dweeby. Maybe your heroine won't stop whining. Or maybe they're both just listless and in need of a personality makeover.

Stuck for character traits that make sense? Check out the star signs! Here's an example:

Let's say you decide your heroine is a Taurus. Here's what I found online:

Taurus Traits:

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Positive Traits: practical, reliable, patient, persistent, determined, strong-willed, solid, affectionate, warm-hearted and trustworthy with a firm sense of values

Negative Traits: possessive, jealous, lazy, self-indulgent, greedy, boring, unoriginal, stubborn and inflexible in opinion

Likes: permanency, stability, luxury, comfort, pleasure and good food

Dislikes: disruption, being rushed, being indoors, being pushed too hard and any break in routine

Is this getting your brain cogs turning? What sort of a heroine can you make out of these traits? I also found out that Scorpio is the opposite sign for Taurus. Guess what that makes me think the hero should be? You guessed it!

Scorpio Traits:

Positive traits: Resolute, loyal, discriminating, determined, diligent, charming, refined and a sense of purpose.

Negative traits: Bullheaded, possessive, secretive, vindictive, jealous, inflexible and introverted.

Likes: Truth, Hidden Causes, Being involved, Work That is Meaningful, Being Persuasive

Dislikes: Being Given Only Surface data, Taken Advantage of, Demeaning Jobs, Shallow Relationships, Flattery and Flattering

See what fun this is? I bet Urania would think these two are a match made in heaven...haha! Excuse the pun. Thalia made me do it.

Next time you're stuck staring at a blank page or screen, call upon one of these nine muses and let them be your guide out of the writer's block quagmire. Or the sagging middle slump. Or whatever's got your fingers frozen and your brain boggled. There is always something to write about, you've just got to choose your muse!