

News from the muse

By Mary Diehl

WHAT IS A MUSE?

No one on our staff has seen any ethereal women in Grecian gowns floating around Capitol Campus (outside of toga parties) since Dr. Mahar's last presentation of Greek comedy. Why, then, do we persist in the use of the concept of a Muse?

In an interview with Jan Garrett in Sydney, Australia, the

modern American poet Philip Levine talked about his interpretation of the poetic muse:

I think the muse is a portion of the self that largely lives asleep and that being inspired is really being totally alive. When I'm inspired I'm physically, mentally, and spiritually more me than I ordinarily am.

I think the muse is a portion of the self which when it suddenly enters the conscious self makes you feel as though you were somebody else. But I think it's just you at your most. And since we are rarely ourselves at our most it does feel a little odd—and it's also delicious—and I think you learn to protract these moments to make them last as long as possible.

One of the arts of writing is, I think, learning how to protract that time of in-

spiration so that it can include the largest possible poem that you're capable of at that moment.

(Philip Levine. *Don't Ask*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981, p. 128.)

It is indeed a "delicious" feeling when the creative inspiration of our Muse is with us, and so one develops one's methods of "invocation". Each artist has his own means of invocation, but it usually involves some sort of contemplative state in which one opens oneself to the inspiration from within.

But it doesn't always work. Sometimes the Muse turns a deaf ear to our invocations, and we remain uninspired. Then the act of creation becomes laborious.

The following poem is about such a time, when one has something which he or she wishes to express, and has prepared for inspiration—which obdurately refuses to appear.

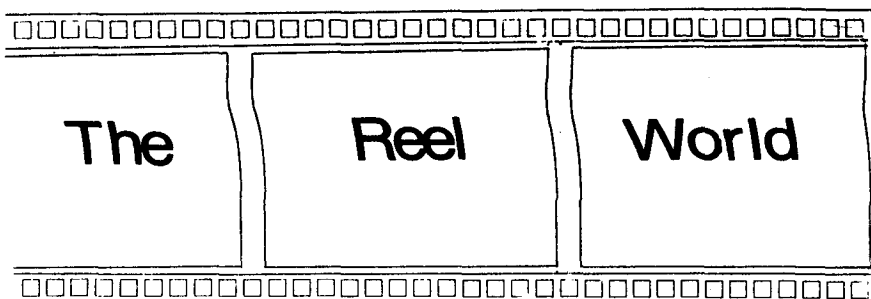
This poet then compared the Sistine Chapel ceiling and Michelangelo's painting of God's creation of Adam to the feeling of impotence one has when the Muse withholds itself.

THE MAKER

The finger points,
writes lifeless words,
moves on. No blinding
binding arc occurs.
The ceiling wasn't first.
How many misbegotten
worlds
are in God's wastebasket,
crumpled by angels'
laughter?

—Eowyn Stark

The next time you are inspired by your Muse, please share your creation with us. We would also like to know what methods you use to invoke your creative self. Send submissions to: *Muse*, Capitol Times, Room 104 (Student Affairs). We are interested in the work of students, faculty, and staff. Names will be withheld if so requested.



By Marsha Larsen

My Favorite Year stars Peter O'Toole as the Errol Flynn-like character Alan Swann who may or may not make his scheduled appearance on the 50's TV show "Cavalcade of Comedy." King Kaiser, a Sid Caesar clone, heads the show and assigns Benjie Stone as baby-sitter for Swann to assure his presence and sobriety at air time.

Benjie Stone, played by Mark Linn-Baker, is a hopeful, brash young comedy writer who, long a hero worshipper of the

swashbuckling Swann, accepts the task willingly. During his stint as the star's overseer, he gets to know the man behind the celluloid image. Swann reveals himself as a troubled, unsure, self-doubting alcoholic, hating himself for failing the people who love him. ("You can always count on Alan Swann to let you down.")

In the meantime, a sub-plot develops. King Kaiser refuses to cut from his next show a skit based on the Mafia figure, Carl Rojak. Rojak confronts Kaiser and threatens to "remove" him, if he doesn't curtail the insulting parodies. The film's two

stories merge in the closing scenes. Predictably, the good guys emerge victorious from their respective struggles.

And so do the actors, thanks only to the casting. The actors fit their parts and play them true to type.

The Swann character, brilliantly portrayed by O'Toole, is a difficult one to bring off. A lesser actor could have reduced the role to a ridiculous slapstick routine. O'Toole shows just enough wet-eyed sadness to add a touch of pathos to his basically comedic performance. Swann is the only character in the movie with depth, and that results from O'Toole's sizeable talent.

Even O'Toole's skill, however, couldn't make up for the simplistic story. The screenplay did what it could, and there were some clever bits; like Swann's "drunk suit," equipped with snaps so that anyone could easily undress the comatose star and put him to bed.

Even though the film is carefully accoutered with certain 1950's artifacts, like cars, it looks contemporary. The lighting, hairstyles, make-up, and costumes are modern. Benjie Stone, for example, with his mop of fluffy hair and funky clothes, appears like a male Annie Hall, not a comedy-writing whiz kid in 1954.

The camera work supports the story well enough. It's lively and shows mostly mid-range to close-up shots, making the film personal and intimate, like the Swann-Stone relationship. Yet the movie seems constrained by the camera and shot with TV in mind. The film, 90 minutes long, is indeed the appropriate length for a television movie: cable or, with the addition of ad time, a 2-hour network presentation.

My Favorite Year, then, is a lightweight made-for-TV comedy blown up to big screen size. As its only attraction, however, Peter O'Toole deserves the price of admission.

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