

Entertainment

"Does Egg nog?"
Eleanor Roosevelt

The wizardry of Oz

Leora Aisenberg

"Storytellers are cripples, monsters, born with their necks turned backwards."

Israeli author Amos Oz faces many directions. Lecturing last week as part of the Jewish Book Fair, Oz reflected upon the past and future of Israeli literature, as well as his own writing.

The 41-year-old Israeli's most famous book is *My Michael*, which explores human relationships in an Israeli context. Oz finds much inspiration for universal drama on the *kibbutz* which has been his home for 25 years.

His status as a writer, however, does not diminish his role as a working member of the *kibbutz*. By writing and driving a tractor, notes Oz, he manages to fulfill his right-winged father's dichotomous vision of his son as a macho soldier/peasant and honoured thinker—a hybrid of "Nimrod the Hunter and a Rabbi."

Although he left home as a teenager to escape a house "full of footnotes and fanaticism", political activism is not foreign to the novelist. "I'm proud that I sometimes emerge from the bush of storytelling to the actual battlefield of politics," he said. As hopeless as some political aspirations may be, I would have been a villain if I never raised my voice from time to time."

Oz is a socialist involved in the peace movement and some of his controversial statements have infuriated fellow Israelis. He contends that he rarely comments on an issue without having firm convictions. "When I agree with myself completely, which is not very often, I write an article or make a speech. When there is a slight inner argument, it forms the embryo of a novel."

The author maintains that "there is always an introduction to a prologue, a birth before a birth."

He traces influences on his works to early Hebrew authors, classic European writers, and ultimately, the Bible. Contemporary Israeli literature, says Oz, is founded upon the soul-searching and desperate madness of earlier novelists and poets, who wrote in the once-dying language of Hebrew. "All of us write and talk to the dead in moments of despair."

Although Israeli readers are obsessed with contemporary literature, they don't necessarily enjoy it. "Perhaps one day they will throw away the books and turn it into political literature in the broader sense," said Oz. In his novels, as in most Israeli art, political siege is translated into emotional siege. Exclaimed the author: "Whatever looks real and permanent today might be gone tomorrow. Nightmares might become real life the next morning."



Irony, skepticism and even self-hatred are common elements of Israeli literature; and Oz's work is

no exception. His characters, however, experience many of the same emotional traumas and sexual fantasies as the rest of the world. "When I'm in the process of creating or taming a character, he or she possesses me," said Oz, adding that "we sometimes have terrible fights."

Oz expressed little desire to join academia, although he is basically supportive of universities. "As a writer at a university, you are regarded as an object, not a subject. You scratch your head and people ask what it stands for."

What his books mean, claims the novelist, is open to individual interpretation. He will continue to write for himself as well as his audience. If Israel, as he contends, is the setting of "the most fascinating drama in the world", Amos Oz is undeniably one of the principal players.

Attack of the film people

Elliott "Rex" Lefko

They're young filmmakers and they are hungry. They are hoping that their work this year will demonstrate some talent, perhaps leading them to jobs next year.

Under the tutelage of film prof Dave Roebuck here are this year's four fourth-year York student films, and their makers:

First up is *Fortune Cookies* (directed by Rob Ryan). Producer Mike Korican call it "an overblown theatrical comedy, with plenty of sightgags. Patterned after the great secret agent comedies like the *Get Smart* series, *Fortune Cookies* was taken from an idea by fourth-year York performance major Antonella Loras, who heads the cast of 25 multicultural characters.



James Wallen holds up a wall.

describes his film as "an after-life comedy."

Co-titled "This Is Your Life Alger Kronk", *Dead Wait* presents hero Kronk (Howard Rock) a fifty-ish author of porn science fiction that does not sell. Kronk dies and is pursued by agents of the afterlife; a corporation known as Deadline. In the role of Bennie, one of Kronk's adversaries, is Peter Creswell, last seen in the two-year old York film *Ziggy*.

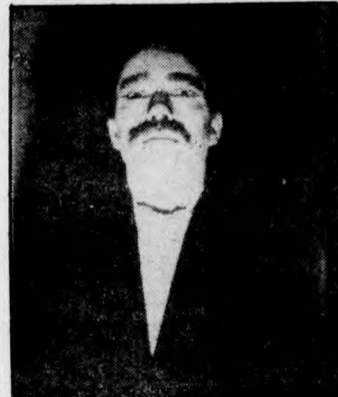
Tupperware, directed by Karen Tully is, in the words of her assistant director Andrew Rowsome, "A punk/Busby Berkley musical in which the heroine leaves her husband and moves downtown to discover the meaning of life. The action comes to a head at a tupperware party in a supermarket where all the participants tap dance in a search for happiness."

Rowsome wrote the music and co-wrote, with Tully, the book. They're employing 36 all-purpose talents—mostly from York. Among the stars are Mimi Zucker, Siobhan McCormick, Scott Thompson, Guy Babineau, Donna

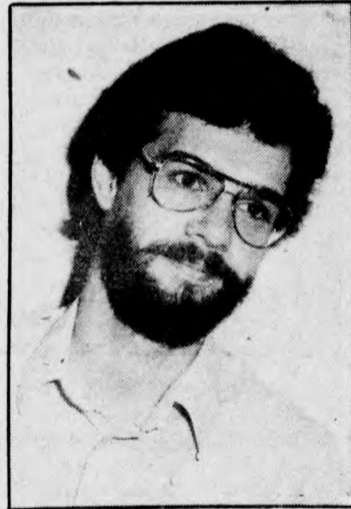
Lypchuck and Lois Fine. The "Interpretive Staff" band will perform the music.

In addition, *The Big, Big City*, Rowsome and Tully's co-directed third-year effort, was picked up by Cineplex recently, as a theatrical short, currently in its fourth week.

Bill Armstrong, director of last year's *Bananas With Nuts On Top* has chosen a Deliverance-type film called *Against the River*. At the time of this writing, Armstrong was rafting down the Nile.



Fortune Cookies



Mike Korican

Writers Loras, Korican, Ryan and co-producer/cinematographer Jeff Shnier hope their film will make people laugh, and also get across a message—in short, entertain.

Dead Wait is a film written and directed by a shadowy youth named James Wallen. "Jake Waller" (as he's been called)

Raging Bull a K.O.

Salem Alaton

Raging Bull walks a tightrope between a highly stylized auteur's approach and a verite character study, traversing the distance with aplomb and impact. In tracing the career of one-time Middleweight champion Jake La Motta, Martin Scorsese has summoned all the resources of the twin generators that have characterized the best of his work; distinctive cinematic style and deep intimacy with his settings. While *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* used these capabilities to produce masterpieces of New York's social chiaroscuro, *Raging Bull* aspires to another dimension in its scrutiny: the individual case.

It does so almost at the cost of audience empathy. La Motta, the film's centre, can be accorded at best an ambivalent response. Abusive and blinkered, it is only through the superb performance of Robert De Niro that La Motta's dark frustrations become effectively speckled with the lights of his desire and pride. Between heart attacks in the Far East (Martin Sheen during the filming of *Apocalypse Now*) and weight gains of sixty pounds (De Niro's near-frightening act of devotion for portraying La Motta's later years) American films are eliciting the kind of Herculean effort which at one time were the hallmark of other arts.

Though set in the 1940's the 50's, *Raging Bull* is never content with the usual dissemblings of the 'period piece'. Ambience is found more through perspective than through material trappings; Scorsese's camera swims around a gangster's Cadillac, falls limpt to the floor of the boxing ring, rests poignantly on an empty mirror after the character has left the shot.

The boxing sequences are almost wholly abstracted—short subjective-viewpoint cinematic

essays of thunder and lightning. Flashbulbs crack like blows, and smoke and blood are the ether of the boxer's atmosphere. The experience is tangible, all-involving; if Scorsese's New York filmic journalism is poetry, then his poetry is, in turn, exceptional journalism. Black-and-white photography, that unsurpassed gargantuan of this century's visual arts, here, in tandem with David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*, boasts its triumphant commercial re-emergence in contemporary cinema.

For Scorsese and De Niro, the triumphs are still, just beginning.

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