

Of rats and men

Kazan should have apologized for 'outing' communist sympathizers

For once an element of suspense surrounded the television broadcast of the 71st Annual Academy Awards. Admittedly it was a close race between Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*, but the real suspense came before the night's big prize, making the best film award seem like something of an anti-climax.

Resembling a scene out of the movies which the awards are meant to honour, the stage was set for some real human drama in the moments before Robert DeNiro and Martin Scorsese presented an honorary Oscar for lifetime achievement to director Elia Kazan.

For those who missed all the pre-show hype about the (in)famous Turkish-American director: Elia Kazan ratted out his friends.

A one-time communist sympathizer himself, Kazan named names to the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) — a 1950s Spanish Inquisition-type body presided over by the now notorious Senator Joseph McCarthy.

To make a long story short, HUAC used the same strong arm tactics employed by the people they were trying to root out — communists in league with the Soviet Union. The committee broadened the scope of its persecution by including people who were communists in the early 1930s when it was seen as a humane alternative to the evils of fascism. Even Charlie Chaplin was told he wasn't welcome in the US.

People tend to forget that communism, which may not be the most practical form of government, is founded on principles of justice and universal equality. That people who believed in these principles were persecuted out of an irrational

fear that they shared the thuggish mentality of a leader like Josef Stalin is perhaps one of the great tragedies of the twentieth century. I remember studying the McCarthy Era in high school and watching *Guilty by Suspicion*, the film which vividly depicted the hypocrisy of that time (ironically, the film starred both DeNiro and Scorsese.)

It is surprising that Kazan, who is known for being able to capture such genuine emotion in his films, could heartlessly rat out his

friends to a malevolent government body. The day after he spilled the beans to HUAC, Kazan took out a full page ad in a newspaper detailing why he did what he did. Using the excuses that communists were brainwashing Hollywood and that the friends he outed were known to HUAC anyway, Kazan defends himself to this day.

Nice excuses! No one forced people in the US to turn into 'raving reds'. There was no forcible internment in gulags or work camps and no one strapped people to tables and threatened them with torture unless they recanted capitalist beliefs. If Kazan insists that he was merely doing his part to protect the civil liberties of his fellow citizens, he did the opposite by ratting on his colleagues.

As for HUAC already knowing the names of those he betrayed, then why did Kazan bother to go through the whole charade of naming them anyway? Things just don't add up.

Those who believe Kazan deserved the Oscar argue that politics has no place in art. This wasn't a question of politics, though — this was betrayal. Regardless of Kazan's political views, he should have kept his mouth shut, knowing the immoral manner in which

HUAC conducted their investigations.

On the basis of his work as a director alone, Kazan probably deserves the honour. But art does not excuse a crime, as one of Kazan's own actors, Rod Steiger, pointed out. If O.J. Simpson was found guilty, would he still be in the Hall of Fame? Would Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun be more highly regarded if he weren't a Nazi collaborator? Is being a good artist more important than being a good person?

Earlier this year I wrote an editorial which examined why geniuses are often forgiven for their faults. Beethoven had a temper, Miles Davis had a drug (and modesty) problem and Michael Jordan isn't philanthropic enough. These faults, however, amount to peccadilloes in comparison with what Kazan did.

What angers most people about Kazan is his refusal to acknowledge his mistake. If he did so, I assume he'd be readily forgiven. Even great people make mistakes. But they should not be exempt from apologizing to those they have harmed. One *Globe and Mail* columnist astutely pointed out that, while politics may have no place in art, Kazan's decision to name names, which subsequently had people blacklisted, prevented other individuals from creating their own art.

On Sunday, not many people chose to boo Kazan. Instead they booed Chris Rock's swipe at the director when he indirectly called him a rat. While many abstained from applause, like Nick Nolte and Ed Harris, the majority of those in attendance stood to give Kazan a rousing ovation.

Either Hollywood has a very short memory, or it seems to think Kazan's Oscar is more important than the lives of the people he ruined.

KARAN SHETTY

EDITORIAL

LETTERS

Kitty Porn Protest

To the editor,

When I picked up last week's issue of the Gazette, I was horrified and offended. First of all we had a *Playboy* executive talking about being (of all things) an executive at a Dalhousie Arts Society sponsored event. Mary MacDonald made a salient point: another speaker should be invited "to respond to the representations put forward by Ms. Rakowitz".

This next speaker should respond to the controversial opinions put forth by Ms. Rakowitz on such issues as: preparedness for

interviews? The utility of networking perhaps? Attitude in the job search? That will make for an interesting speaker indeed!

However it was not Ms. Rakowitz's presence that... ahem... outraged me with that issue, for it is on the back page that you have truly crossed the line. Just as soon as I'm finished protesting the presence of Charles Bukowski in our libraries, I'm going to start a lobby to protest the 'kitty porn' that adorns the back of this week's paper.

Who's in?

Chris Brown

THE GAZETTE

is pleased to announce the following new editors for the 1999/2000 season;

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News Editor: **Amy Durant & Sally Thomas**

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All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

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What would you do if you were Prime Minister Reggie?

Blow me Wilbur. blow me!

