

Entertainment

Catholics vs. the Talmud

New play analyses some ancient persecution

By BOB POMERANTZ

In The Tarragon's new play, *Johannes and the Talmud*, Basya Hunter deals with many questions. Primary amongst them lies the concern: How much and for how long should a person stand up for what he believes is just? To Johannes Reuchlin, the main character, the answer is evident - a man must defend what he believes in, to the end.

The play, taken from a historical incident, is based in sixteenth-century Germany. An edict has been issued by the Emperor for several renowned Catholic scholars, Reuchlin among them, to research the Talmud (one of the foremost writings of Judaism).

The Emperor's purpose is clear: If, in fact, the Talmud is evil and preaches against the Catholic Church, as the church believes, the books will continue to be burned, with a few Jews thrown in the fire for emphasis. If, however, the Talmud proves relatively harmless, then perhaps less drastic measures would be established for the treatment of Judaica.

As the play begins, Reuchlin embarks upon his investigation. Problems arise when he seeks out a Rabbi to help him delve into the essence of Talmudic teachings. Reuchlin is struck by the books' brilliance and advocates to the Emperor in his pamphlet, *De Augenspieler*, he not only advocates to save the Talmud, but

strongly condemns the church for her ill treatment of the Jewish people and all things Jewish. The plot follows the lonely struggle Reuchlin endures in standing up for Jewish rights, while defending his integrity as a Christian scholar.

The major theme of the play seems to stem from this question of endurance. There is Reuchlin's own endurance, brilliantly explored by David Hemblen, who plays the part with great sensitivity. He deals deep within Hunter's character to set the stage afire with Reuchlin's burning zeal for 'truth, always truth'.

Rabbi Margolit's endurance is of the Jewish stiff-necked variety. He is a man who defends Jewish principles in the face of Catholic torment and ridicule. Kurt Freund totally captures the character - a man who, though resigned to accept a difficult life, never backs off from the responsibility to lead his people. Freund's shuffling walk and demonstrative hands are all attune to the spirit of his character. Best of all, his eyes gleam with sorrowful indignation, eyes which Reuchlin describes as those that "weep, yet are radiant".

The Rabbi's two sons, Samuel and Beryl, who are played competently by James Kirchner and Ron Barry, illustrate two other roads of endurance. Samuel endures by his acceptance of a difficult existence, finding solace in his religion, as does his father.



Rabbi Margolit, played by Kurt Freund

Beryl, however, takes the radical route - the route of resistance by fighting Catholic persecution with force, ending up strung up from a tree in Frankfurt.

The set is simple yet effective. Tall screens resembling prison grills are constantly moved around on an otherwise sparsely furnished stage to accentuate the concept that Hunter's characters are prisoners - entrapped by the ignorance and intolerance of Catholic fear; fear of aliens but more, fear of the future.

The poverty stricken surround-

ings of the Jewish quarter are contrasted effectively with the richly furnished, sumptuous but decadent strongholds of the Catholic faith.

The costumes never skimp on detail, each precisely suited for each character. Dress relates closely to properties where, for instance, if the Rabbi's study is modestly furnished, it is complimented by his tattered garb. Some of the Priestly robes and scarves are works of art. Just how much attention was given to wardrobe is evidenced by a specific credit, given in the programme, to Robert Rybka, who supplied the Rabbi's beard.

The lighting, although well thought out, was sloppily executed. Fade-outs and shadings served to distract the viewer from the play's focus rather than draw him closer

to it. The music, sung by a male chorus, echoed with mournful tones capturing the mystic flavour of the Jewish Cabbalah. The musical accompaniment to the Slichot service was especially effective.

The staging was innovative, full of crispness and colour. When necessary, the scenes took on tableau dimensions to accentuate Hunter's idea that the Catholic officials were more concerned with striking the proper poses than doing what was right.

The banner scene is especially memorable. Credit should be given to Bill Glassco for yet another masterpiece in theatre direction.

It is difficult to delineate all of Basya Hunter's concerns, for there are many. Where concern for standing up for one's rights is primary, several other issues spring from this. One, is that violence is not the answer to anything, and that it is better to tolerate than decimate. Also explored is the precarious issue of family ties and loyalties among friends, a question that she never resolves but into which Hunter offers some probing insight.

Finally, the Talmud itself is dealt with. In speaking with Basya Hunter, who emphasized the fact that the Talmud has succeeded in helping the Jewish people to endure and prevail in the face of determined attacks on their survival. It is, she said, a book of law which disciplined a dispersed people, adding permanence and unity.

Though Basya Hunter is not fanatically concerned with latent anti-semitism and other forms of prejudice, she is thoughtfully aware of it and advocates greater education for both Gentile and Jew alike, as an answer to combat human intolerance.

York's other campus shows off

By AGNES KRUCHIO

Theatre Glendon, the new space for the burgeoning dramatic arts programme at Glendon College, was launched with a bang at the top of reading week. The opening play *Goodbye Pompeii*, was the brand new creation of a Glendon professor, about, and for, Glendon students. It was acted, directed and designed by past and present Glendon students. To top it off, two Toronto dailies came to review it, an unusual distinction for an amateur company, and both praised play, players and production alike.

In *Goodbye Pompeii*, playwright Bob Wallace brought together some highly visible university types, threw them in a Cabbagetown student commune and let them work out their individual and collective problems from there. Admittedly, some of these characters are more typical of Glendon than of other colleges, but they could almost as easily appear at any Canadian university in the mid-seventies.

Willy one of the characters, becomes involved with his history prof, Hanna, who is divorced and has a child. He is baffled by her aloofness she calls him "young, beautiful and vain." and refusal to make him the centre of her life.

Another inmate, Danny, has come out of the closet during the school year, and now brings home gay friends who always leave in the morning. Brent is a kid with a rich father who bought his way through second year, but really only wants to be a carpenter. Emily, self-styled "dumb kid from North Bay", now lives with Brent, all the while trying to hide the fact from Victorian parents.

It's the last night before everyone goes off on his own way for the summer. Nothing has worked out, especially communal living, and the house is falling down.

To add to the sense of déjà-vu is

Ted Paget's set of the archetypal Cabbagetown commune kitchen which is just as realistically grotty as the myriad kitchens anyone of university age has seen or lived in.

After a sluggish start during which we are introduced to the characters, the action takes off. The house, about to be demolished, is a wreck, but Emily adds a farewell flood by breaking the bathroom sink.

During the course of the night the problems emerge. Danny wants to be honest about his homosexuality, but learns the hard way that honesty is not always the best policy when he is rejected from a seminary. Willie's housemate, Sue, makes friends with Hanna and she and Willy begin to sort out their relationship. Danny's French-Canadian lover, Henri comes back next morning to fix the pipes and the house gets a last minute reprieve from demolition.

Goodbye Pompeii could have become a soap opera, had the characters degenerated into caricatures. To the credit of director Charlie Northcote, this was avoided and, characters, though archetypal, become real persons.

Although heavily laden with conflict, *Goodbye Pompeii* is not a psychological drama. Introspections and analyses are not allowed to be come tedious, and are frequently relieved by a funny line or episode.

Herein lies much of the play's strength. Although much of the dialogue deals with the characters' there are some exquisitely funny, timeless lines.

Some of the excessive truisms, (Sue: "We must listen to each other") could be easily trimmed without damage to the rest of the text.

Playwright Wallace intends to use this experience as a first trial of the play in front of a live audience before revising it.

Theatre Glendon is not intended

for York's use alone but will serve the outside community as well. The next play will be Ionesco's *La Lecon*, starting March 2.



Centre de Main-d'œuvre
du Canada

Canada
Manpower Centre

Main-d'œuvre
et Immigration

Manpower
and Immigration

A MESSAGE TO GRADUATING STUDENTS

Are you planning to seek career employment soon?
Don't wait any longer. Start your preparation now.
The staff at the Canada Manpower Centre on Campus
can help in many ways:

1. Listings of current job opportunities are maintained and updated regularly.
2. Labour market facts are available about the businesses and organizations hiring university graduates, the kinds of careers offered, and forecasts of occupational requirements.
3. Assistance in developing your job search skills: setting your objectives, planning your search, writing a resume, and preparing for interviews.

See us at the

Canada Manpower Centre on Campus
N108 Ross Building

Hours: 8:15-4:30 Mondays to Fridays
Thursdays at Glendon College
Room 101 Glendon Hall