

Women Beware Women Sexual violence

Many women at Glendon College are outraged by the staging of the play *Women Beware Women*. The play by Howard Barker was chosen by Prof. Don Kugler for production in his drama course here at Glendon. This play involves an uncritical portrayal of male sexual violence against women. There are two rapes in the play, both of them are orchestrated by another woman. The director's note in the program blames the victim, "Bianca is as much a collaborator in her exploitation as she is a victim of it...The final act of violence (rape) against Bianca is catastrophic not because it is a violation of herself, but because it is self-discovery." Rape is not only justified by this play, through the blaming of the victim, but it is also portrayed positively as a route to self-revelation.

Rape is a violent crime that should not be treated so callously. That Prof. Kugler, the co-ordinator of the drama program Bob Wallace, the administrators of Theatre Glendon and others should be surprised at our angry response demonstrates their lack of understanding of the reality of

rape's pervasive and destructive impact on women's lives.

In a social context where sexual violence against women is pervasive (one in four women has been sexually assaulted) and where male justification for this violence is widespread we consider the production of this play to be irresponsible. Notices on the wall by the entrance to the theatre stated that in the tradition of Theatre of Catastrophe the audience is meant to "go home disturbed or amazed." We do not oppose the Theatre of Catastrophe's portrayal of the "uglier side" of humanity. We found, however, that we were much more than "disturbed" by this production of the play. Women who have experienced male sexual violence first-hand or through the supportive work they have done with survivors, are outraged. We feel that this play is a further assault upon women. On Friday March 22, female students and supporters stood quietly by the box office holding signs making statements such as, "My experience of male sexual violence was NOT a voyage to self-discovery." This was our message.

We never called for the censoring of this play. Rather, we question whether it was an appropriate play to stage and whether it was produced responsibly. Individuals in its production, most notably Prof. Kugler and the administrators of Theatre Glendon, appear to be oblivious to this responsibility. In the very least, we feel that the administration of our college should accept responsibility for ensuring that the climate of violence against women on our campus is not enhanced.

Arguments for the academic freedom of Prof. Kugler parallel those used to defend Professor Phillip Rushton's racist research at the University of Western Ontario. Prof. Kugler's academic freedom must not be allowed to override his responsibility for the effect his production has on the women of this college. At Glendon, where the student body is approximately 80% female, we demand the right to an education free from sexist harassment.

An Open Letter from the Glendon Women's Centre