

# The New York Times

Review: May 19, 1960

## Rod Serling's "In the Presence of Mine Enemies" on Playhouse 90

Written by Jack Gould

Rod Serling and Playhouse 90, perhaps the most consistently fruitful partnership in television theatre, scored again last night with a drama of searing tragedy and nobility over Channel 2.

The work was Mr. Serling's original play, "In the Presence of Mine Enemies," a study of members of a Jewish family in the infamous Warsaw ghetto that was exterminated by Nazi bestiality.

In ninety minutes Mr. Serling searched beneath the anguish of the Jews who faced the indescribable torture of living death. But more specifically, in a series of brilliant characterizations, he examined the different courses chosen by the victims to preserve their integrity. Whether it took the form of recourse to religion or the gun, the pursuit of honor was an individual decision.

With a gallery of particularly superior performances by Charles Laughton, Arthur Kennedy, George Macready, Oscar Homolka, Susan Kohner and Robert Redford, the drama captured not only the degradation and despair in the ghetto, but in its conclusion there was also a moving affirmation of the dignity and indestructibility of the human being. "In the Presence of Mine Enemies" attests to the continuing growth of Mr. Serling as a playwright.

The drama related the fate of Rabbi Heller, the spiritual leader of a tenement in the ghetto, and his children, a son who escapes from a labor camp and a daughter who is ravished by a Nazi captain. It is in the conflict between the elderly man's reliance on his faith and his son's eagerness for active resistance that the play attains its absorbing stature, a discussion of values under the most difficult circumstances conceivable.

There were many exceptional individual scenes from Mr. Serling's pen, none more so than the absolutely chilling Nazi officer's explanation of how anti-Semitism performed a unifying national function. And the sequence of the raping of the lovely Jewish daughter was intimated with beautiful simplicity and bitterness.

Mr. Laughton's delineation of the Rabbi was unusually fine, incorporating the elements of pity, defeat and, finally, intellectual courage into a believable whole. Mr. Kennedy's portrayal of the son bent on establishing that a Jew's death could really mean something had an incisive power

that never was overdone. As the Nazi captain, Mr. Macready was embodiment of cold cruelty and total emptiness.

Miss Kohner vividly interpreted the young woman who realizes she has been deprived of the opportunity to choose her child's father. As the young Nazi lieutenant with a conscience, Mr. Redford, a newcomer to the ranks of TV stars, made an exceptional contribution in his depiction of a man trying to reconcile a personal code with military brutality.

Mr. Homolka, as the Polish peddler who sacrifices his life for the Jews, and Sam Jaffee, as the frightened carpenter who goes mad looking for an escape, completed the well-balanced company.

Fielder Cook's direction had the sustained virtue of both suspense and restraint. In its compassion and excitement it was excellent. The production was by Peter Kortner.