

Cloning drama

ATF's final show is thought-provoking

By **BOB ROSE**
Special to *The Post-Star*

GLENS FALLS • Prolific British playwright Caryl Churchill's "A Number" is very definitely a drama for serious theatergoers who prefer to be intellectually challenged rather than simply entertained. Best known for her "Cloud 9" and "Top Girls," in "A Number," Churchill confronts the social and scientific aspects of cloning.

Among the emotional and spiritual questions posed by cloning are the effect it has on those cloned. Are they brothers, and perhaps twins? Or are they the same person with identical personalities? In cloning, what happens to individualism?

And the question is re-examined as to whether such beings are affected more by their shared genetics or their individual upbringing in different surroundings.

There was a time when experiments to determine this were conducted on separately brought up twins until such studies were outlawed.

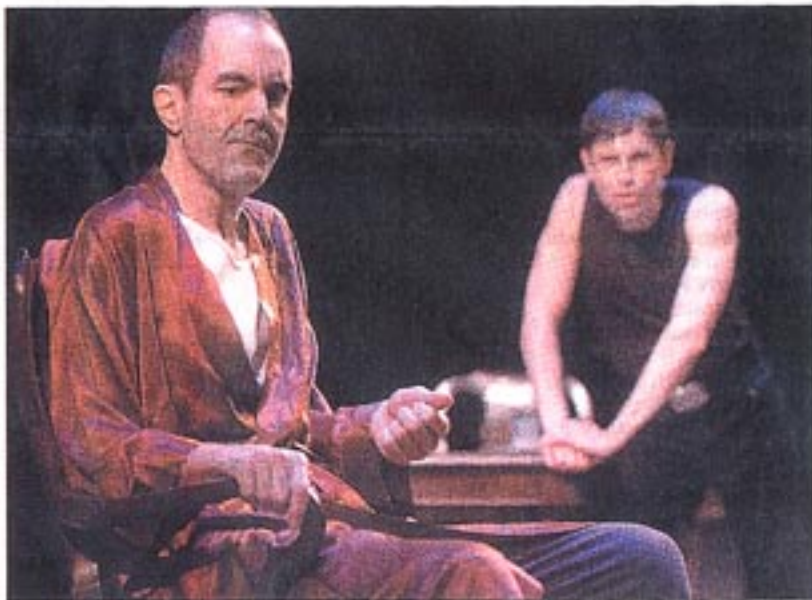
What part does parental ego play in allowing cloning? And, then, how much a part does money play in the parental decision to permit cloning?

These and other questions are raised as a father is confronted by his son and two clones, all responding differently to the news that they are not distinct individuals.

There are only two actors, Robert LaVelle's Salter, the father, and David Barlow playing his son, Bernard, and two clones of Bernard. These fellows do a marvelous job of acting, with Salter being at times a distant parent, loving but not too much so. Barlow has the challenging job of portraying the son and his clones, all alike but all different in subtle ways.

The father's seemingly comfortable life turns into a nightmare when he is confronted by these offspring, most of whom he did not know existed. So much for scientific honesty and discretion.

Everything in this one-act play with five scenes is downplayed to allow total focus on the question of genetic cloning and its possible effects on human beings. The stark setting, the costumes, even the size of the cast take secondary emphasis and yet all are most effective in their intent and result.



Sound and lighting effects contribute to the coldness and frightening reality encountered in this probing of what is already one of the weighty questions facing us in the 21st century. Genetic engineering is here and it is very likely to remain. It is up to society to decide to what extent and in what form. Obviously,

Salter's nightmare becomes ours.

"A Number" is a weighty, somber play. I've heard that there can be many laughs in it too, but on opening night the audience response would hardly warrant saying that. If you like an occasional dose of intellectually serious stage drama, this play is perfect for you.

IF YOU GO

Adirondack Theatre Festival will repeat "A Number" through July 29 at the Charles R. Wood Theater with performances Wednesday through Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets, \$27. Call 798-9663.