



HISTORY'S WILD SIDE

By JOHN CHARLES

There's a certain muddled quality to *The Revenger's Tragedy* in Gyllian Raby's Northern Light Theatre production, at the Kaasa Theatre in the Jubilee Auditorium, which leaves you dissatisfied.

Yet the director's ability to create stunning images and ripping theatre has never been clearer.

This 17th-century play, usually attributed to Cyril Tourneur, is the ultimate nightmare vision of life as murder, corruption, lust, and viciousness.

Darker side of life

From the first grotesque moment of Vindice (Blair Haynes) the revenger, clutching his father's skull and vowing vengeance, the play never lets up in its exploration of the ununny side of the street.

"When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good," gloats the Duke (Alan Stebbings), who has murdered his father and taken his lands.

The Duchess (Anne) lewdly couples with her stepson Spurio (Paul Panyi), and they eagerly peer into a sack at the head of an enemy, only to discover the wrong head.

The arch-villain Lussoriosio (Pamela Haig) plots to seduce or rape Vindice's sister Gloriana (Julien Arnold):

17TH CENTURY HORROR FROM NORTHERN LIGHT

Gloriana's mother, Antonia (Maralyn Ryan), tries to talk the girl into selling herself. What's her honor, in a world where only jewels and power matter?

Raby creates a world in which people never just walk. They slither, make martial-art moves, or writhe like cats in heat. These movements are so smoothly performed they seem like nature's way, rather than nature's perversion.

Set designer Nigel Scott has created a sunken central area that looks like a pool for drowning, or a gladiators' pit. It's a magical, mysterious arena, backed by construction mesh that creates a cage.

Raby's notes, which tidily explain the set, don't convey the power of this spellbinding, flexible space.

Eikewise, Leona Brausen's beautiful samurai/punk costumes are more mysterious and suggestive than Raby's explanations allow for. Raby's best ideas can't be reduced to words because they're too interwoven with non-verbal aspects, including Darcy Phillips' dread-filled music score. She



—Photos by Robert Taylor

should allow her audience to find their own way into her plays.

The first act has the richest texture of dark comedy and encroaching evil. Adapters Brad Fraser and Jeffrey Hirschfield have hewn from Tourneur's huge play the focus Raby wants, but the second act becomes simplistic.

Revenge is a bad thing — "leave justice to heaven," we're told. This is banal compared to what we've been shown. Vindice seems justified in his actions, not tragically corrupted, given the world he's part of. The moral Raby points us toward isn't the one we buy.

Exhilarating production

In spite of the problems of comprehending the plot, (it needs clear diction at all times), this is a confident, exhilarating production, with unforgettable images and a strong, unified acting style from the vibrant, committed cast.

Revenger's Tragedy plays through March 25.