

THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY  
2006

# Incest, rape and murder

*Mark Aspen reveals that The Revenger's Tragedy brings a sinister mix to Hampton Hill*

There is a vicious circle of darkness and death in The Revenger's Tragedy that spins in a relentless whirlpool of incest, rape and murder, where we are implored to "... attend me, I am past my depth in lust and I must swim or drown".

Teddington Theatre Club's production, at the Hampton Hill Playhouse, kept within its depth by steering a course between black comedy and heavy tragedy. For, although TS Eliot called this Jacobean play "an intense and unique and horrible vision of life"; Thomas Middleton's high casualty list slay-fest owes its impact not so much to its lashings of sex and violence, but to the vitality of its luridly magnificent poetry.

Seeking revenge upon a lascivious Duke, who had poisoned his fiancée some decade earlier, Vindici comes in disguise to the court where the Duke's eldest son, Lussurioso, appoints him as his procurer.

Vindici's Machiavellian cunning brings about the downfall not only of the Duke and his heirs, but eventually of himself and of his accomplice, Hippolito.

Vindici is a man past the threshold of madness, with no consistent motivation, full of sardonic bile at one moment and earnest zeal at the next. Illustrated by his multiple disguises, notably as the provincial Piato, Nick Young splashed the stage with a visceral interpretation of the duality of the man's personality, diabolically driven by revenge above feelings of grief (which were never apparent) or of morality.

Young's Vindici did not seeth: unlike the Duke, whom John Roth had spit-

ting with power, a grey grandee of gross and greedy senile sensuality.

Yet, at his horrific death at the hands of Vindici, he glimpses a vision of his own sin. However, Roth was so enjoying playing the Duke that his later appearance as Antonio, a virtuous lord, was not sufficiently differentiated in character.

Nigel Cole, the half-smile telling it all, played the Duke's heir Lussurioso, another arch-dissimulator, in all his lascivious treachery. Equally, the Duke's stepsons, as slimy a trio as you wouldn't want to meet, spoke in loud body-language, and as their double dealing turned into triple dealing, Junior (Scott O'Brian) oozed and Ambitioso (Tom Wright) oiled their way, while Roland Chesters as Supervacuo minced in weasel steps across the stage.

Their incestuous mother, the Duchess, was played with austere abandon by Denise Truscott. Her volcanic hairstyle symbolised the hot magma of her nymphomania, as she dallied with her stepson, the Duke's bastard, Spurio. Divyesh Thakerar was exceptional in this part, so showing us his embittered corrosive nature that we could well believe "Hate all I". All this family of vipers fall directly or indirectly to the sword of Vindici.

Hippolito, Vindici's brother in Middleton's text, became Carla, his disguised sister in this production. The justification for this given in the programme is not wholly convincing, but the cross-dressed Clare Cooper gave an astringently athletic performance in this role, as the reluctant accomplice, although often the question was posed: does Hippolito-Carla follow or lead?

They inveigle their mother to try to prostitute their sister Castiza (Jenny Hodge) to

# theatre



**A head for theatre: Nick Young.**

Lussurioso. Merlyn Lowther, as the mother, gave a pathos-laden picture of vulnerability, as she was reduced to sobbing repentance.

The bloodbath ends with a whirling pavane, choreographed by Fran Billington and Jenny Laughlin as a danse macabre.

Equally well choreographed were Clive Russell's gasp-inducing sword fight sequences.

Jean Goodwin's set, which was taken into

the audience on a thrust stage, was a curious Halloween hybrid of scaffolding, slide shows and skulls. Although it had many ingenious elements, it did not have a discernable integrity or design continuity. Director John Buckingham has created a sinister work of art. He has slightly caricatured this amoral world, where untrammelled revenge creates both a vicious circle and a circus of viciousness.