'Dutchess of Malfi' outdoes television's violence

BY JEFF SCHORR

If your idea of a night out at the theater is to get away from television's "sex and violence," you better steer clear of the Hilberry Theater's final repertory offering, "The Duchess of Malfi,"

The Wayne State University company does its usual excellent job with this heavy and horizont state university company does its usual excellent job with this heavy and horizont state in Renaissance Italy. But the realistically greesome bloodletting in the final act is so pervasive that by play's end, not a major character in the cast is alive.

John Webster, the author, has been compared favorably to his contemporary, William Shakespeare, and at times the lines and couplets remind you

Review

of the Bard. But the plot tends toward wearying ponderousness and the three-hour production — despite its fast-paced, swashbuckling finish — seems too long.

The principals do a fine job, particularly Jim Birdsall as the evil, brooding Cardinal and his equally dastardly and vengeful brother (though with a conscience) Prince Ferdinand, the Duke, played by Mark Robbins.

The play centers around their sister, the widowed Duchess, played by Barbara Acker, and the bloody events set

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in motion by her secret marriage after having been warmed against such a thing by the brothers.

HOWEVER, JOHN Morgan Lund, in a major role, and Cynthia Dozier, in a supporting role, stood out as each of these chartetter appeared to be something other an they really were.
Lund, as a space the position of the property of the property

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al feeling of their contemporaries. When she switches loyalties to the depressed and agitated Besola at the end, their brief passion is believable and

THE COSTUMING is beautiful and



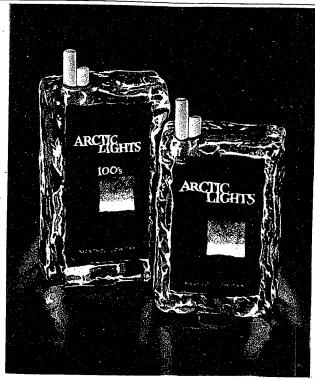




"The Dutchess of Malfi" features Barbara Acker, Mark Robbins (seated) and Geoffrey Beauchamp.







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