

# York professor rouses revenge

By PAULETTE PEIROL

*Dark Arrows, Chronicles of Revenge*  
Collected by Alberto Manguel  
Penguin Books, 219 pgs.

"Almost every day, there he was at the door, smiling, with the vile envelope in his hand. I pointed the revolver and fired three times. He didn't say a word; he just fell. No chief, it wasn't her lover. It was the mailman." Thus ends the brilliant tale by Rachel de Queiroz, "Metonymy, or the Husband's Revenge," one of 13 stories collected by Alberto Manguel in *Dark Arrows, Chronicles of Revenge*.

Revenge, notes Manguel, is perhaps the oldest theme in literature; even God has held the reins of revenge countless times. It is the one act whose mother tongue is Justice, voices of reason and morality notwithstanding.

Manguel writes: "As readers, we are seldom interested in the fine sentiments of a lesson learnt; we seldom care about the good manners of morals. Repentance puts an end to conversation; forgiveness becomes the stuff of moralistic tracts. Revenge—bloodthirsty, justice-hungry revenge—is the very essence of romance, lying at the heart of much of the best fiction."

While all of the works in this collection deal with retribution, (divine or otherwise), few of them actually feature blood-thirsty, violent characters. Revenge, it seems, takes many forms, and can even backfire on the avenger. Yet the stories are all romantic in that heart-palpitating emotions are the source of their characters' actions.

Manguel doesn't refer to any pre-ordained criteria in his selection of these 13 stories, and indeed, they are as varied as interpretations of revenge itself. If there is one thing they all share though, it is a sense of ellusiveness; a lack of finality.

Ambiguity often reigns in the characters' motivations and the outcomes of their actions. If revenge was nothing more than a matter of tit-for-tat, *Dark Arrows* would be redundant. Fortunately, due to the diversity of the stories selected, it isn't.

Manguel, a part-time professor at Vanier College, is well known as a translator and as a book and theatre critic. His expansive knowledge of literature from all cultures is apparent both in *Dark Arrows* and in his previous book, *Black Water: The Anthology of Fantastic Literature*. *Dark Arrows* features a multicultural selection of authors: Rudyard Kipling from India, three Irish writers, three South American authors, Burmese author Sredni Vashtar, two Americans (E.L. Doctorow and Faulkner), British author Fredrick Forsyth, the German Henrich von Kleist, and yes, there is a Canadian contribution; Ken Mitchell. Two of the authors, Isodoro Blaisten and Edmundo Valadés, have been translated by Manguel himself.

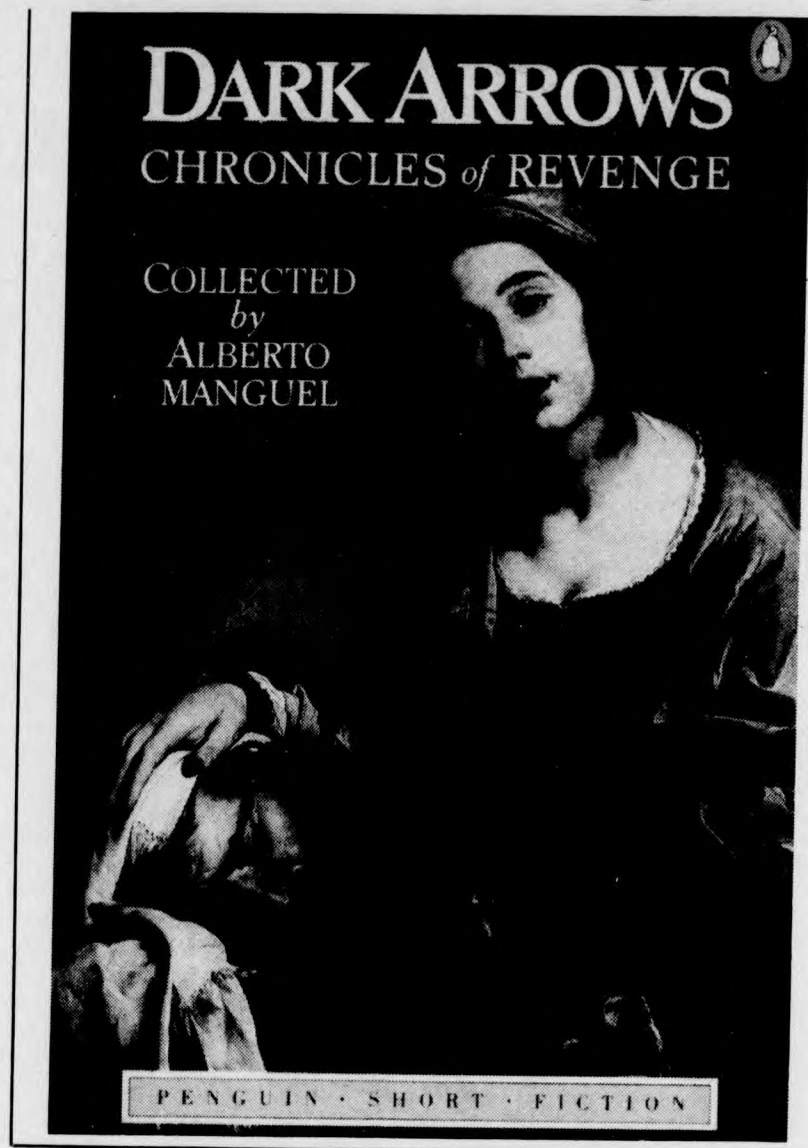
It is interesting to compare cultural differences regarding the theme of revenge. In terms of humor, the Irish stories are also notable for the progression of a simple innocuous gression of a simple innocuous prank becoming a full-blown assault on an often innocent character. The South American stories, on the other hand, center more on pathos and violence.

It is unfortunate that Mitchell is the only Canadian author included in the collection, for his story "The Great Electrical Revolution," is the weakest in the book, dealing with petty revenge on the Electric Company in the Great Depression. Yet Manguel notes, in his introduction to this story, that it is surprising how little Canadian authors have dealt with the theme of revenge. "I concluded that, in fact," Manguel

writes, "an interesting essay might be written on why the theme of revenge is not popular in Canadian literature." Incidentally, it would also be interesting to find out why there are (apparently) not many women writers dealing with the revenge theme, at least in the short story genre. Rachel de Queiroz is the only female author in *Dark Arrows*.

The authors also reveal their dif-

ferences stylistically. The genius of William Faulkner's "A Bear Hunt," for example, lies in the compelling and convincing dialect of its narrator, Ratliff: "Hit sounded like a drove of wild horses coming up that road, and we hadn't no more than turned towards the door, asking one another what in tarnation hit could be, with Major just saying, 'What in the name of—' when hit come



across the porch like a harrycane and down the hall, and the other busted open and there Luke was."

Three of the stories pose children as the avengers, and one, Lord Dunsay's "The Pirate of the Round Pond," is told in the child's first person narrative. What is fascinating about these pieces, especially E.L. Doctorow's "Willi," is that naivety and innate justice seem to go hand in hand, unhampered by morality in the minds of these children.

Contrasted with these are the complex, mysterious plots contained in such stories as Bram Stoker's horror story "The Squaw," Heinrich von Kleist's "The Foundling," and most notably in Rudyard Kipling's "Dayspring Mishandled," about a Chaucer manuscript forgery.

Three stories which are simple but powerfully illustrative of cultural morality are Saki's "Sredni Vashtar," about a child who prays to an Indian goddess for divine power, Fredrick Forsyth's "There are no Snakes in Ireland," an allegorical tale about an Indian dealing with racial prejudice in Ireland, and "Permission for Death is Granted," Edmundo Valades' chilling description of a band of Mexican Indians fighting for land rights.

All of the works contained in *Dark Arrows* are exceptionally well crafted, and their authors are gifted story-tellers in the oral tradition. There is nothing avant-garde in the collection, and imaginative content definitely seems to have been Manguel's editorial prerogative.

The next time anyone asks you "Heard any good ghost stories lately?" mention instead, Alberto Manguel's *Dark Arrows: Chronicles of Revenge*; it's just as chilling and perhaps a lot more inspirational.

## Female Caesar boggles the eye, numbs the mind in sci-fi blitz

By REBECCA CANN

Style does not a statement make. Or so it has been proven by Future Shakespeare's *Caesar*, playing at Toronto Workshop Productions until March 23. The production values and all-female cast of the performance create a highly-stylized, sci-fi extravaganza, striking to the eye and ear. But the undercurrent of indifferent directing, and the intellectual obtuseness of the whole, leave mind and heart unmoved.

Director Vinetta Strombergs has taken two interesting ideas, the casting of all women and a futuristic setting, and applied them to *Julius Caesar* with little consideration as to the significance of these decisions. Instead of an intellectual re-think of the play, the production merely gives rise to an opportunity for designers to strut their stuff. The results are visually, and aurally, stunning.

As the masked actors slid onto the stage one by one, weaving hoops, streamers and sparklers in the air, Allan Guttman's electronic soundscape filled the theatre, emoting rhythm, power and intensity. This milieu of sight, sound and movement served as a showcase for the fantastical costumes of designer Linda Muir. White frills and lace-like skirts swept around the stage, flat-footed clown-shapes passed by, spaceship-type coveralls glimmered. Yellow, blue and pink highlighted the whiteness, but the huge bows slung over shoulders and hanging by hips concealed daggers. The death of Caesar saw the actors returning onstage in black, touched with red and gold. The heavy capes, boots, belts and

strappings signified the state of war.

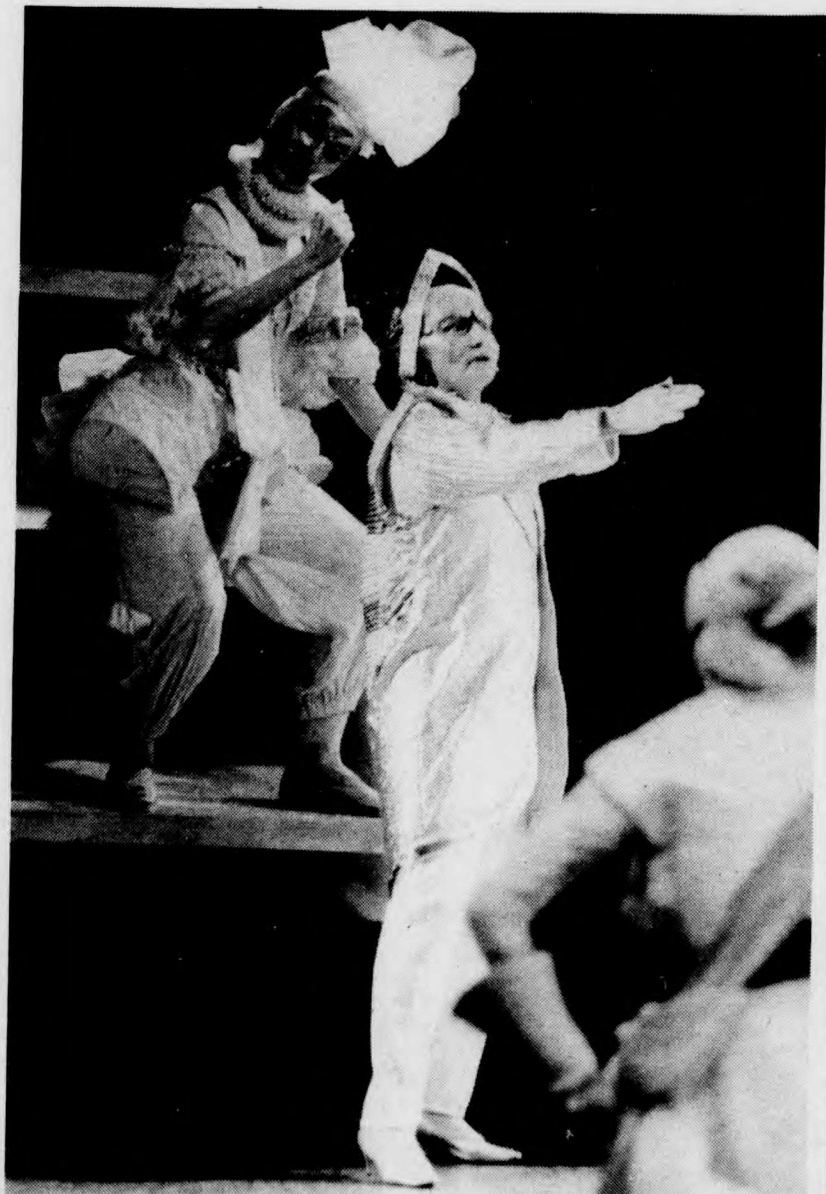
The sinewy surrealism created in the opening of the production rapidly disappeared as the performance progressed. Shakespeare's words were putty in the hands of Strombergs and some of the actors—squashed and flattened centrestage. On an intellectual, and more often an emotional basis the actors seemed lost with the text. Speeches and soliloquies saw actors abandoned in the middle of a bare stage, left by Strombergs to fend for themselves with little waves of the hand. Relationships between characters were more often than not undeveloped. Portia's pleading speech to Brutus was painful in its pointlessness—neither actor seemed interested. What little action there was—outside of some flamboyant choreography—enhanced props rather than text. The costume change of the second half brought unqualified relief to the mire of text comprehension.

This is particularly disappointing in light of Neil Freeman's presence in the production as text consultant. Freeman is a professor of York's theatre department and has done extensive work in the analysis of rhythms and word patterns in the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. Last year he directed *Romeo and Juliet* for the theatre department and the quality of text comprehension and exploration resulted in a powerful and exciting production. The quality of Freeman's work is undeniable but his presence is unfelt in *Caesar*. Strombergs was provided with the tools but has failed to do her homework.

Not everyone suffered from indifferent understanding. Carolyn Hetherington's Caesar was eloquent and dignified; wide-eyed, rabbit-like uneasiness exemplified Peg Christopherson's Murellus; Ellen-Ray Hennessy provided Caska with a sharp, eyebrow-lifting dryness; and Deborah Grover, in one of the evening's best performances, inspired Mark Antony with a youthful naivete spurred to revenge by compassion and self-determined zeal. In parts like these the use of women in *Caesar* evoked a depth of awareness in the good and bad of humanity.

The casting of women provided Strombergs with an opportunity to choreograph some fascinating rhythmic movement during the final battle scenes. A toe-heel chant-stamp of feet signaled the coming battle troops, and as they appeared the rows of black-clad women moved inexorably closer to each other. The controlled, hypnotic columns met in a weaving of bodies, without contact. Thus, the intensity of war was vividly portrayed without even the simulation violence.

While the choreography and production values of *Caesar* are entrancing, they exist in an intellectual vacuum. Taken alone they are rewarding, but within the context of the production they become meaningless. With so little emphasis on evoking an intellectual and emotional understanding of the text such exaggerated production values fall to the wayside. What started off as a stimulating idea has proved to be only flashy, colorful gift wrap on an empty box.



**THE FINE ART OF BACKSTABBING:** Julius (Carolyn Hetherington) takes lessons from Caska (Ellen-Ray Hennessy) in the all-female *Caesar*. Linda Muir's costumes are a treat to behold but the overall production suffers somethin' dreadful.