

Frankenstein, Writtle Cards

Performed October 25, 2012 at Writtle Village Hall

Director – Michele Moody

Mary Shelley's Gothic horror was adapted for the stage by Tim Kelly and adapted even further, I suspect, for the small stage at Writtle. The action takes place in Frankenstein's study at his home in Geneva, just after the death of William and just before the wedding to Elizabeth. The set was excellent, with French doors to the garden stage right, an entrance from the rest of the house, stage left and the door to the laboratory centre stage. Furniture and other large props seemed to fit the period and costumes too, particularly those of the women, added extra credibility. Some liberties with the sequence, the outcome and geographical location of events are taken by the playwright but what remains is a good story that gathers pace, particularly in the second Act as the tension grows between Frankenstein and his creature.

Nick Caton as Frankenstein maintained a controlled angst throughout, occasionally punctuated by outbursts of frustrated anger. I watched the first night but wondered whether the angst became more suppressed boiling rage as the production developed. Frankenstein is supposedly consumed by inner torment at the enormity of what he has unleashed upon the world and yet he seems deeply unwilling to confess what he has done. This guilt mingled with a lack of mental courage must surely manifest itself in a more physical way. Perhaps a more dramatic eye makeup, with red rings around the eyes to suggest chronic sleep deprivation would have helped formulate the character.

The chemistry with Henry Clerval (Kenton Church) was good and the scenes with the Creature (Neil Smith) were well done. The Creature defied visual expectations of a Boris Karloff or Herman Munster look-alike and after the initial disappointment the reality of a cut and sewn human being made sense. He did, after all, teach himself to speak and to reason by observing a family through a hole in the wall for many months, so why should we expect an inarticulate monster? This triumvirate of Frankenstein, The Creature and Henry Clerval dominated the dialogue and held the story to the end but the additional characters were also strong. I particularly liked Daniel Curley as Ernst and Clare Williams as the hapless Justine.

This was a slow burn story that came to a mighty conflagration at the end and was certainly thought-provoking. The time-slip between Act 1 Scene 1 and the subsequent scenes confused me a little but the resolution in the final scene made sense and provided the audience with a satisfactory ending. No such ending occurs in the book, which remains difficult to translate onto a small stage. Nevertheless, this was an enjoyable play which challenged the audience to think about its perceptions of what limits human beings should place upon their translation of scientific understanding.

Reviewer – Stewart Adkins

Regional Representative, District 8

NODA East