

FRANKENSTEIN

Saturday 27th October 2012

Reviewer: Michael Gray

Mary Shelley's Modern Prometheus very much in the spotlight this Halloween, and I don't just mean Frankenweenie ... He's the classic serial on Radio 4, Channel 4 are carrying a documentary about the National Theatre Production and Writtle Cards are reviving the stage version by America's most prolific playwright.

Tim Kelly's 1974 Frankenstein retains much of the philosophical meat of the original, the Milton and the Coleridge, though liberties are taken with the characters and the plot. There's some clunky dialogue, ["maybe he won't show up"], and the most bathetic curtain line you could wish for, fluffed, very understandably, the night I saw it: "We'll get some shovels from the greenhouse". All six scenes are set in the study in the Château, beginning and ending with Victor's wedding night. So Ireland, England, Orkney and Geneva are all shoe-horned into these three walls, and much of the story unfolds through narrative and reminiscence, much of the passion, guilt and fear in flashback. Key here is the childhood friend and confidant Clerval, played by Kenton Church.

The scientist is strongly delineated by Nick Caton, holding the audience with his intense, passionate speeches. The Creature, too, with his "complete mastery of speech", [Neil Smith] impresses with his stillness and his dignity. Dramatic contrast with these heightened emotions from Sarah Wilson's down-to-earth Elizabeth, Daniel Curley's brutal police inspector and Megan Hill's timid maid. Frau Frankenstein [spared the scarlet fever in this version] is given a lively characterization, and the only Swiss accent, by Liz Curley. And Clare Williams made the most of the wronged Justine, who might just cheat death in this open-ended adaptation. Leave room for the sequel – Kelly himself also gave us Frankenstein Slept Here and Frankensteins Are Back In Town.

The production would have benefited from more consistency in the choice of music, and in the furnishings of Frankenstein's study. But there were many deft touches, two of them involving the skeleton standing stage left throughout, and some enjoyably melodramatic moments.

Frankenstein was directed by Michele Moody, and produced by Laura Bennett.