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Reader's Report

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Analyst:	Julie Saint-Anne	Writer Eval:	NA

REACTION

From the title, I expected a woman's story, the story of Frankenstein from Elizabeth's point-of-view. I expected to experience her innocent devotion to a young man; her growing alarm, as each time he returns from school, he grows increasingly more depraved, her irresistible curiosity and driving concern for his welfare as she sneaks off to Geneva to investigate the cause of his terrible evolution, her horror as she discovers his secret studies, her fearless, foolhardy attempts to dissuade him from danger, her failure and resentment, perhaps her vengeance that brings her to the brink of damnation, and the tragedy of her death. I expected a story full of mystery (since she couldn't know what he's doing when he's away from her, and doesn't understand the science despite her innate intelligence and curiosity). I expected a forceful account of a woman in a man's world, breaking the established conventions of her era in the name of love and science.

What I got was a willful siren whose intelligence consists of nonsequitor observations about the stars and life, whose love for Victor is blindly based on nothing in particular, whose memoirs reveal nothing emotional, and experiences she can't have knowledge of. What I got was the same old story from a new age perspective, with some kind of unsupported line of logic that somehow connects the monster's creation with the onset of the technological age.

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Opening with Elizabeth's forceps birth, her mother's death, and her father turning her care over to the gypsy midwife led me to believe these would become pivotal elements in the development of the story. Instead, they were just background, brought back in the dialogue as motivation for her sympathy with the monster. Her gypsy upbringing which, with it's inherent mystery and ritual isolation, could have become an integral character trait, was dismissed as soon as she left the tribe – to reappear only in a gypsy heart symbol for love. And what kind of loving father would leave his newborn daughter with a gypsy woman (given the predominant fear of gypsies) when he could just as easily, and more logically, have left her with the doctor who was present? The prevailing myth at the time regarding gypsies was not only that a gypsy would sell the girl, but that gypsies steal children.

How do I feel about the characters? Elizabeth is raped by Victor. He betrays this virgin in the most brutal, callous fashion. She's enraged. He asks her to marry him. She's delighted. Forgives him for raping her. Never mentions it again. Or even once. Never accuses him, or even reconsiders her devotion to him. No alarms, no consequences? Victor gives me no reason to sympathize with him, no reason to identify with his obsession, no sense of unbridled passion, just a weak competition with his weirdly overbearing father. Adam, the once and future monster, begins as a perfect soul; an unworldly, trustful, innocent gypsy – surprised at the prejudice he encounters (not very credible). His trauma creates a character who one moment climbs the side of a building to turn back the hands on a clock thinking that will turn back time, and the next moment speaks with the erudition and insight of an elder statesman, who is proclaimed "ultra-intelligent" because he mimics his master.

Did I believe the relationships? There weren't any. I felt like I was watching cardboard dolls interacting for the sake of inane dialog. The coven of crones, Victor's mother, all acted as a greek chorus; background noise. There was no sense of comraderie or shared intimacy. No sense of interconnection between the characters.

Was I moved by the story? To laughter. The melodrama combined with the stilted dialog and anachronistic contradictions, without the relief of fresh insights, a new point-of-view, or interesting characters bored me – despite all the seeming activity. I found myself laughing out loud at the inanity of their unmotivated or illogical actions. For example, Elizabeth (who has come to seek Victor) stumbles onto the scene of Adam's maiming. She rushes off to find Victor in the clocktower, but he's already on the scene, so she's missed him. She returns to the scene, but they've already left for the clocktower. That was good. But then what

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does she do? She leaves without seeing Victor – and takes a refreshing dip in a pond?

Bottom line gut reaction: The story is very impressive – if it was written by a 15-year-old.

ANALYSIS

Now, from a purely analytical point-of-view ...

The script is supposed to be a memoir. By definition, that's a restricted p.o.v. We can see only what the title character has experienced herself. The opening image of Elizabeth reading her own diary reinforces the impression that this is a real-time rendition of the words from her diary. So, when we dissolve to her birth, are we to believe she remembers it? Or is the birth scene just expensive theatrics? If the former, the v.o. should indicate it. If the latter, the v.o. is redundant and confusing. And her difficult birth should be an essential key to her character. By using v.o. in the opening sequence, however, the author demonstrates she's unafraid of the convention. Nonetheless, she never again uses it where it could be useful, in transition between events she experiences and character developments that confound her – as though we're hearing passages from the diary!

The anachronisms are inexcusable. I have no axe to grind for historical accuracy. This is, after all, a fiction. But, the story of Frankenstein takes place long before Mesmer came on the scene. And it takes place in a teutonic country, far from Mary Shelley's English countryside. What is she doing there? And, although Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was one of the pioneers of women's suffrage, communal living, and free love, it was certainly not a common moral convention. The credibility of the Baron welcoming a stranger with a wave while he performs a naked head-stand doesn't establish the convention of the story's universe, or demonstrate the family's trashing of convention - it just wrecks credibility. Especially since, as the story progresses, he's painted as a very conventional fellow. The very idea that Claire would speak to a stranger in the street, or go into a tavern alone is contra-convention – unless she's a brazen hussy or a whore. Breaking the conventions of the time can be wonderful for character definition, but it's the contrast of establishing the convention, and then having the character break it, that makes it work.

The writing is entirely passive tense. Correcting every "she is standing" and "she is sitting on" to "she stands" and "she sits"

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alone will remove 20 pages. Correcting convoluted, run-on sentences, overuse of names (instead of pronouns) and lack of contractions would remove another 10 pages.

No reincorporation of events, or even characters, leaves threads dangling and wastes valuable characters. There seems to be no reason for all the time spent on Elizabeth's upbringing, since it doesn't affect her perspective or the events of the story. Rosina never reappears, even as a memory. Elizabeth and Adam don't recognize each other from their childhoods. The gypsy way of life doesn't color the tale or the events.

Structurally, there is far too much emphasis on life at the castle before we get to the story itself. When will it begin? Repetitious scenes establishing motivations through dialog could be summed up more effectively in powerful, active, cinematic scenes and visual reactions. Matter of fact, less dialog throughout would force actions to have more meaning and subtext. Motivations (Elizabeth leaving home, Victor's obsession, Adam's leaving the tribe) are restricted to dialog rather than implied by action.

The dialog, stilted by clumsy exposition, carries no undercurrents. Pedantic, immature, non-sequitor rambling. These 19th century characters speak with the sensibility of late 20th century adolescents.

Character development, even where there are opportunities for it, doesn't happen. We get no realizations of contradictions, no recognition of flaws or failures, no growth, no change, no regrets.

The concept, the story of Frankenstein from Elizabeth's point-of-view, is compelling and timely. My recommendation is to rewrite from scratch, using her "diary" to form a cohesive structure, using her limited p.o.v. to create mystery, suspense, and motivation, and using a strong lead character to create compelling motivation, internal conflict, and external action.

NOTES

As I read, I made page-by-page notes on the script. I'll be happy to return it to you for note-by-note review.