

'Farmhouse' by John C. Gilmour ☆☆☆

The Malmaison Hotel in Leith is a glamorous setting for a theatre show; but there's no hint of the pleasant or reassuring pre-dinner entertainment about this latest production from Andy Corelli's bold Edinburgh-based group Siege Perilous.

Set in a remote farmhouse in Highland Perthshire, John C Gilmour's new play is a real psychological shocker about unhinged patriarchal aggression, and its horrific impact on the life of a bright but vulnerable young woman.

Claire –beautifully played by Clare Ross – is heavily pregnant when she arrives at the farmhouse with her partner Anthony, after their car breaks down in the hills.

The lonely farmer, Lachlan, helps out, but then persuades the young couple to spend the evening with him; and as the night wears on, secrets and lies about all three characters begin to emerge like a series of monsters, raging around the kitchen table.

There's something uneasy about the structure of this 65-minute play, which does little to prepare us, in the first 45 minutes, for the strange, nightmarish dream-sequence into which it moves towards the end, and then for the pure sadistic horror of its finale; a risk, at worst, of appealing to those who enjoy misogynistic violence for its own sake.

There's some fine acting on view, though, in this fast-paced, brave and inventive production; and a gripping hour of theatre, for those willing to face the pity and terror of a very serious 21st-century tragedy portrayed in fierce close-up, and never fully contextualised or resolved.