

La Belle Assemblée, or Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine, 2d Series, 17 (March 1818): 139-142.

This is a very *bold* fiction; and, did not the author, in a short Preface, make a kind of apology, we should almost pronounce it to be *impious*. We hope, however, the writer had the moral in view which we are desirous of drawing from it, that the *presumptive* works of man must be frightful, vile, and horrible; ending only in discomfort and misery to himself.

But will all our readers understand this? Should not an author, who has a moral end in view, point out rather that application which may be more generally understood? We recommend, however, to our fair readers, who may peruse a work which, from its originality, excellence of language, and peculiar interest, is likely to be very popular, to draw from it that meaning which we have cited above.

The story of *Frankenstein* is told in a letter from a Captain Walton to his sister, Mrs. Saville, residing in England. Walton is almost as much of an enthusiast as the wretched Frankenstein, whom, as the Captain is in search of finding the north west passage, and penetrating as far as possible to the extremities of the pole, he meets, engaged in the pursuit of the demon-being of his own creation: Walton rescues Frankenstein from the imminent danger of losing his life in this pursuit, amongst the floating flakes of ice; and after this Prometheus recovers, in part, his bodily strength, and relates his history to Walton.

Frankenstein is a Genevese; (these people are not naturally romantic) but Frankenstein's mind has been early warped by a perusal of those authors who deal in the marvellous. His father is a respectable Syndic, and has taken under his protection a niece, born in Italy. In due time, Frankenstein and his fair cousin become lovers, and their union is sanctioned by his father. He has also the blessings of a sincere friend, Henry Clerval, of a stronger mind than the Prometheus, who is absorbed in the study of natural philosophy, which he declares as "the genius that regulated his fate."—When he becomes a student at the University of Ingoldstadt, he bewails, as his first misfortune, the death of his mother; and when his grief has begun to subside, he devotes himself entirely to chemistry and his favourite science: the structure of the human frame particularly excites his attention, and, indeed, every animal endowed with life: he then proceeds to examine *the cause of life and death*—(how vain)—and finds himself capable (we use the writer's own words) "of bestowing animation on lifeless matter!!!"

This reminds us of the famous philosopher who declared, that, give him but matter enough, and he could create a world! Why, then, could he not form one in miniature, about the size of an egg or a walnut?

To return to Frankenstein; he had no longer any doubt but what he could create a perfect man! But his workshop, and the process he was compelled to observe, disgusted him; for

he tells Walton, that "the dissecting-room, and the slaughter-house, furnished him with materials." On a dark night of November he completes his work, and the eye of the creature opens; whom, in order to make superior to his species, he has formed eight feet high! He is soon after surprised by a visit from his friend Clerval; and trembles at the idea of his seeing the monster he has created: he steals up softly to his apartment, and finds that the demon has fled.

After a fit of illness, which causes a cessation of his studies, he is afflicted, on his return to them, by a letter from his father, acquainting him that his little brother William is murdered; the picture he wore round his neck being found in the pocket of an interesting young girl, the attendant on Elizabeth, Frankenstein's cousin, she is accused, and suffers innocently. After visiting the parental roof, as the unfortunate Prometheus is wandering among the Alps, he beholds the frightful being he has formed, and he feels convinced in his own mind that he is the murderer of his brother.—This being seems, indeed, to have a supernatural power of following his maker wherever he goes, and he soon after meets with him near Mont Blanc. He here relates to Frankenstein how he has supported his miserable existence; but he feels the charm, and the imperious want of society, by having beheld, in a cottage, an old peasant and his daughter, with a young man; they are indigent, but, in comparison with his forlorn state, most happy. Delighted with the picture of social life and its affections, he seeks to contribute to their wants; piles wood before their cottage, when they want fuel, and other offices unperceived: by listening, he gains speech, and understands the meaning of different words. The arrival of an Arabian lady serves to complete the savage's education: he hears the young man read to her, and obtains a slight knowledge of history. This part of the work is rather prolix and unnatural; the monster learns to read, and is delighted with *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and *The Sorrows of Werter!*

The demon then confesses himself the murderer of Frankenstein's brother; and, moreover, declares his intention of immolating the rest of his family, if he does not create a female like himself, with whom he may retire to undiscovered wilds, and molest mankind no more. Frankenstein, at first, positively refuses, but at length consents.

After pausing some time in travelling, Frankenstein and Clerval visit Scotland; and the former retires from the society of his friend, to undertake, in the solitude of the Orkney Islands, the dreadful task assigned him. When he has half finished the wretched work, he reflects that, perhaps, he is bringing a curse on future generations, and he tears the thing to pieces on which he is engaged. The monster presents himself, and after some severe upbraidings, he tells him he will be with him on his wedding night.

The fragments of a human being lying before him, urge Frankenstein to seek his safety by flight; he packs them in a basket, sails from the Orkneys, and sinks them when he has attained the midst of the sea: he next arrives at a good harbour, where he is taken up for murder; and for the murder, too, of Clerval, his friend, whose mangled body is presented

before him: this deprives him of reason; and in a gaol, loaded with irons, like a malefactor, he suffers all the agonies of the mind, accompanied with frenzied fever. He is, however, at length, honourably acquitted, and accompanies his father, who comes for him, back to Geneva, where preparations take place for his wedding; for which, when the day is arrived, Elizabeth is found dead, after coming from the sacred ceremony, and lying across her bridal bed. He now makes a solemn vow to find out the fiend of his creation, and to destroy him, though the work of his own hands. He traverses wild and barbarous countries; where, in some places, he beholds inscriptions on the rocks and trees, as, "My reign is not yet over" – "You live, and my power is complete," &c. &c. By perseverance, Frankenstein, at length, meets with him, where Captain Walton first discovers him; and whom Frankenstein, after bringing his narrative to a close, intreats to avenge his cause by killing the monster, should he die. He expires soon after; and this *wonderful* work of *man* comes in at the cabin-window of Captain Walton's ship, breathes a soliloquy over the coffin of his creator, and then plunges into the icy waves, the same way as he entered.

This work, which we repeat, has, as well as originality, extreme interest to recommend it, and an easy, yet energetic style, is inscribed to Mr. Godwin; who, however he once embraced novel systems, is, we are credibly informed, happily converted to what he once styled *ancient prejudices*.

We are sorry our limits will not allow us a more copious review of *Frankenstein*. The few following extracts will serve to shew the excellence of its style and language:—

ENTHUSIASM OF FRANKENSTEIN IN HIS WORK OF FORMING MAN.

"Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption."

DESCRIPTION OF FRANKENSTEIN'S MAN WHEN FIRST ENDOWED WITH LIFE.

"It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety almost amounting to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion,

and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips."

HIS REPENTANCE AT HAVING FORMED HIM.

"I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me."

ARGUMENTS HELD OUT BY THE MONSTER.

"All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends.

"God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested."

FRANKENSTEIN'S AGONY ON THE DEATH OF ELIZABETH.

"Great God! why did I not then expire?—Why am I here to relate the destruction of the best hope, and the purest creature of earth. She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Every where I turn I see the same figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier. Could I behold this and live? Alas! life is obstinate, and clings closest where it is most hated. For a moment only did I lose recollection; I fainted."

THE MONSTER'S REFLECTIONS OVER THE DEAD BODY OF FRANKENSTEIN.

"That is also my victim!" he exclaimed; "in his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close! Oh, Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst.—Alas! he is cold; he may not answer me."