

The Literary Panorama, and National Register, N.S., 8 (1 June 1818): 411-414.

This novel is a feeble imitation of one that was very popular in its day,—the *St. Leon* of Mr. Godwin. It exhibits many characteristics of the school whence it proceeds; and occasionally puts forth indications of talent; but we have been very much disappointed in the perusal of it, from our expectations having been raised too high beforehand by injudicious praises; and it exhibits a strong tendency towards *materialism*.

The main idea on which the story of *Frankenstein* rests, undoubtedly affords scope for the display of imagination and fancy, as well as knowledge of the human heart; and the anonymous author has not wholly neglected the opportunities which it presented to him: but the work seems to have been written in great haste, and on a very crude and ill-digested plan; and the detail is, in consequence, frequently filled with the most gross and obvious inconsistencies. We shall hereafter point out a few of those to which we allude.

The story begins at the end. Walton, an enthusiastic traveller, bound on a voyage of discovery in the north seas, after having been for some time surrounded with ice, is astonished by the appearance of a human being of apparently savage character who passes the vessel at a distance, in a sledge drawn by dogs. The day after this extraordinary adventure the ice breaks up; but previously to the vessel sailing away from it, they encounter another human being, nearly exhausted with fatigue and privation. This last, who is taken into the vessel, proves to be Frankenstein, the hero of the tale; who at the time he had been nearly destroyed by the breaking up of the ice, was in pursuit of the being that had passed the vessel on the preceding day. After a time Frankenstein contracts a friendship with Walton, the Captain of the vessel, and relates to him his supernatural story.—In his youth he had been led by accident to study chemistry; and becoming deeply interested by the results of his experiments, he at length conceived the idea of its being possible to discover the principle of vital existence. Taking this possibility as the leading point of his studies, he pursues them with such effect as at last actually to gain the power of endowing inanimate matter with life!!! He instantly determines to put his newly acquired power into practice; and for this purpose collects the materials with which to form a living human being. From the difficulty of arranging some of the parts, arising from their minuteness, he determines to chuse them of more than ordinary size. In short, after incredible pains and perseverance, he at length succeeded in producing a living human being, eight feet high, and of proportionate powers. From this moment Frankenstein commences a life of unmixed and unceasing misery. The being which he has formed becomes his torment, and that of every one connected with him. He causes one by one the death of all Frankenstein's dearest connections; his brother, his friend, and lastly his wife—whom he murders on their wedding night. The fiend then quits the country where he has committed these horrors; and Frankenstein, in despair, determines to pursue him until he shall either destroy him, or die by his hand. The story ends shortly after what we have related in the beginning. Frankenstein dies on board the vessel of Walton; and the fiend

may, for any thing we know to be the contrary, be wandering about upon the ice in the neighbourhood of the North Pole to this day; and may, in that case, be among the wonderful discoveries to be made by the expedition which is destined there.

We have mentioned that there are gross inconsistencies in the minor details of the story. They are such, for example, as the following: the moment Frankenstein has endowed with life the previously inanimate form of the being which he has made, he is so horror-struck with the hideousness of the form and features, when they are put in motion, that he remains fixed to the spot, while the gigantic monster runs from the horizontal posture in which he lay, and *walks away*; and Frankenstein never hears any more of him for nearly two years. The author supposes that his hero has the power of communicating *life* to dead matter: but what has the vital principle to do with *habits*, and actions which are dependent on the moral will? If Frankenstein could have endowed his creature with the vital principle of a hundred or a thousand human beings, it would no more have been able *to walk* without having previously acquired *the habit* of doing so, than it would be to talk, or to reason, or to judge. He does not pretend that he could endow it with *faculties* as well as life: and yet when it is about *a year old* we find it reading *Werter*, and *Plutarch* and *Volney*! The whole detail of the development of the creature's mind and faculties is full of these monstrous inconsistencies. After the creature leaves Frankenstein, on the night of *its birth*, it wanders for sometime in the woods, and then takes up its residence in a kind of shed adjoining to a cottage, where it remains for many months without the knowledge of the inhabitants; and learns to talk and read thro' a chink in the wall! "*Quod mihi ostendit,*" &c

We have heard that this work is written by Mr. Shelley; but should be disposed to attribute it to even a less experienced writer than he is. In fact we have some idea that it is the production of a daughter of a celebrated living novelist.