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The Inconsistencies in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was received with a lot of skepticism from the critics of her time. Some faulted Shelley’s literary brand of shock and horror for being pseudo-diabolic whilst others believed that it was her husband who actually wrote the book. One of the most scathing reviews of *Frankenstein* is the *Literary Panorama* review, which criticizes Shelley’s work for being an unimaginative replication of William Godwin’s *St. Leone*. The critic expresses disappointment in the fact that Shelley’s *Frankenstein* failed to live up to its billing, and explains that the book is inclined towards materialism and hence lacks philosophical depth. This forms the thesis of the critique, which the author proceeds to justify and to explain why Frankenstein is not as good as many people seem to think. The *Literary Panorama* review adequately portrays Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an inconsistent tale which does not merit the overwhelming attention which it has received.

The critic acknowledges the brilliance of the plot of *Frankenstein*, but disparages Shelley for failing to use the opportunity to write a compelling tale. Instead, the critic explains, “the work seems to have been written in great haste, and on a very crude and ill-digested plan; and the detail is, inconsequence, frequently filled with the most gross and obvious inconsistencies” (The Literary Panorama). The greatest inconsistency, according to the critic, is the fact that the creature was able to immediately learn for itself how to think and act like a human being despite the fact that it was born out of nothing. The author alludes that the creature ought to have undergone a more authentic and intense learning process such as that which babies go through before they can be independent. Instead, the critic states, the creature simply jolts away from the very table on which it was created and bolts into the night while Frankenstein remains transfixed in horror. The fact that the creature only takes two years before he is able to read complicated texts such as *Plutarch’s Lives* is also very irksome to the critic, who expects a more natural transition through the growth of the creature. The critic clearly does not deem *Frankenstein* to be worthy of any further review, and concludes by condescendingly stating that perhaps the people who thought that the book was written by Mr. Shelley were wrong, since it was clearly authored by an amateur.

Similarly, the *La Belle Assemblée* critique of *Frankenstein* finds a lot of fault in the text. However, the critic opposes Shelley’s work on moral principles rather than purely literary ones, and explains that “did not the author make a kind of apology (in the preface), we should almost pronounce it to be impious” (*La Belle Assemblée*). However, unlike the *Literary Panorama* critic, the *La Belle Assemblée* critic finds some relevance in Shelley’s work and opts to use the story as an illustration of the dangers of trying to use science to overcome the limitations of human nature. The critic recognizes that Frankenstein was driven by a natural human desire to overcome death. However, the critic believes that the young doctor used a dangerous approach which ultimately backfired on him and caused his demise. Still, the *La Belle Assemblée* critic empathizes with Frankenstein’s decision and understands how anyone would have taken the same course of action as the doctor did. However, the critic also draws a comparison between Shelley’s work and that of William Godwin who came before her, and says that even though the story has some originality and an energetic style, “it is inscribed to Mr. Godwin”(La Belle Assemblée). Unlike the *Literary Panorama* critic, the *La Belle Assemblée* critic also finds several instances of good writing in *Frankenstein*, and proceeds to highlight them at the end of the critique.

Despite creating one of the most widely adapted tales of the Victorian era, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was not received well by many critics. Some found minor faults in the work, such as inconsistencies in the story, while others considered it a feeble attempt at imitating Godwin, and disregarded it completely. However, the critiques of *Frankenstein* illustrate the impact that the story had on the people at the time. Critics who examined the book further also found many instances of exemplary literary proficiency in Shelley’s work. Whether Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was rejected because it was very revolutionary to the extent it was tagged as evil, or because Shelley was a woman in a patriarchal Victorian society, the story opened up a new frontier in shock and horror which modern authors have continued to explore over the years.

Works Cited

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