

## CONTENTS

### PART ONE: INTRODUCING *FRANKENSTEIN*

How to study <i>Frankenstein</i> .....	5
<i>Frankenstein</i> in context .....	6

### PART TWO: STUDYING *FRANKENSTEIN*

Synopsis .....	10
Introduction .....	12
Preface.....	13
Volume One, Letters.....	14
Volume One, Chapters I–VIII.....	18
Extended commentary: Chapter V pp. 58–9 .....	24
Volume Two.....	29
Extended commentary: Chapter II pp. 101–3 .....	31
Extended commentary: Chapter VIII pp. 144–5 .....	39
Volume Three.....	42

### PART THREE: CHARACTERS AND THEMES

Characters	
Victor Frankenstein.....	50
The monster .....	51
Robert Walton .....	52
Alphonse and Caroline Frankenstein.....	53
Elizabeth Lavenza and Justine Moritz .....	54
Safie, the De Laceys and Henry Clerval .....	55
Themes	
Creation and divine aspirations .....	56
Isolation .....	56
The family.....	57
The double .....	57
Fear of sexuality.....	58
Critique of society.....	58
The monstrous and the human .....	59

### PART FOUR: STRUCTURE, FORM AND LANGUAGE

Structure	
Narrative structure.....	61
Form	
Narration .....	62
The Gothic .....	63
The Romantic movement.....	65
Language	
The language of the Gothic.....	66
The 'godlike science' of language .....	67
The problem of voice.....	67

### PART FIVE: CONTEXTS AND CRITICAL DEBATES

Historical background	
Social unrest.....	68
Scientific developments: the life principle.....	68
Literary background	
Analogies and allusions .....	70
Critical debates	
Original reception.....	72
A minor work .....	72
Feminist readings.....	72
Rethinking <i>Frankenstein</i> .....	72

### PART SIX: GRADE BOOSTER

Assessment focus.....	74
Targeting a high grade.....	75
How to write high-quality responses.....	76
Questions with statements, quotations or viewpoints .....	78
Comparing <i>Frankenstein</i> with other texts .....	80
Responding to a general question about the whole text .....	82
Writing about contexts .....	83
Using critical interpretations and perspectives .....	84
Annotated sample answers.....	86
Working through a task .....	90
Further questions.....	91

### ESSENTIAL STUDY TOOLS

Further reading.....	92
Literary terms .....	93
Timeline .....	94
Revision focus task answers .....	95
Mark scheme.....	96

## CHARACTERS

## VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

## WHO IS VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN?

- Victor is the son of Alphonse and Caroline; brother of Ernest and William; adoptive brother and later husband to Elizabeth and the childhood friend of Henry Clerval.
- He creates a giant being but abandons him.
- The monster begins to avenge himself on Victor's family, and Victor is persuaded to make him a female companion, which he ultimately rips to pieces.
- Clerval and Elizabeth are murdered and Victor follows the monster into the Arctic where he meets Walton. He dies on board Walton's ship.

## ALIENATION

Like the monster, Victor is an isolated individual; his alienation, however, is self-imposed. While the monster longs for the companionship and affection he is denied, Victor avoids and rejects the family and friends who love him. He claims this is necessary in order to pursue his quest for the secret of life. There are many suggestions in the text, however, that Victor is rebelling against all human ties, against those human relationships that bind one to a family or community, against familial and sexual love – all relationships that might interfere with the pursuit of his own needs and desires.

## CONTEXT

A04

Prometheus was a popular figure with the Romantic poets, who emphasised his role as the suffering champion of humankind and the archetypal rebel hero.

## CRITICAL VIEWPOINT

A03

Chris Baldick compares Victor's story with that of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: both men make a dangerous pact with forces they do not really understand. But the world of *Frankenstein* is an entirely secular world – no gods, no demons. While Faust's damnation is brought about by Mephistopheles, Baldick argues, 'Victor Frankenstein has no serious tempter other than himself' (Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 1990, p. 42).

## STUDY FOCUS: A MODERN PROMETHEUS

A03

Victor, as the subtitle of the novel suggests, is a searcher after forbidden knowledge, one of those Promethean overreachers who refuse to accept limitations and are subsequently punished. He is, however, more specifically a 'modern' Prometheus. This is an entirely secular world – there are no gods for this Prometheus to steal fire from – and all is achieved through science. The analogy with Prometheus raises a number of questions about Victor. Is he really driven by a desire to help humankind or is he driven by a desire for personal glory? Is his real crime the creation of a being, or is it his failure to take responsibility for what he creates?

## ROMANTICISM

Contemporary critics often consider that, through Victor, Shelley criticises the egocentric and antisocial tendencies of Romanticism. She pushes the Romantic figure of the isolated creative imagination to its extremes and demonstrates the dangers associated with solitude and introversion. Victor resembles the Romantic artist in the way he repeatedly claims to suffer for his aspirations. Indeed, he and the monster vie with each other to claim the most suffering.

## KEY QUOTATIONS: VICTOR

A01

- Victor's ambition: 'A new species would bless me as its creator and source' (p. 55).
- On his work: 'I pursued nature to her hiding-places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil ...?' (p. 55).
- Last words to Walton: 'Seek happiness in tranquillity, and avoid ambition ... why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed' (p. 220).

## THE MONSTER

## WHO IS THE MONSTER?

- He is created and then abandoned by Frankenstein. Spurned and attacked by all, he begins to avenge himself on Frankenstein by murdering William and framing Justine.
- He meets Victor and demands a mate. In revenge for Victor's destruction of his companion the monster kills first Clerval and then Elizabeth.
- The monster leads Victor across Europe and into the Arctic. When Victor dies, he appears to mourn him and then disappears.

## THE MONSTER'S EDUCATION

In spite of his unnatural origins, the monster can initially be seen as a new Adam or a **noble savage**: he claims to be benevolent, innocent and free from prejudice. As his education continues, and he moves from learning about nature to culture, he learns about injustice in society. He also learns about emotions and comes to desire love and companionship, but he is rejected and denied these because of his appearance. Peter Brooks suggests that the story of the monster's education 'is a classic study of right natural instinct perverted and turned evil by the social milieu' (see, 'Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts', 1979, p. 215).

The character of Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* may well have influenced Shelley. Prospero berates Caliban for his behaviour and reminds Caliban how he was taught and educated. Caliban says, 'You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!' It is arguable whether this is the same or a converse situation to the monster's – the classic nature versus nurture argument.

## STUDY FOCUS: THE MONSTER SPEAKS

A02

The monster, perhaps unsurprisingly given his reading material (*Paradise Lost*, a volume of Plutarch's *Lives* and the *Sorrows of Werter*), is eloquent, a master of rhetoric. He believes that if he acquires language he will convince the De Lacey family to overlook his appearance and accept him. He masters language, but does that language in any way save him? What does he learn from what he reads and hears? It could be argued that, instead of allowing him entrance into society, his mastery of language serves only to make him more fully aware of his unique origin and alien nature. In this respect, perhaps his education is part of what makes him miserable.

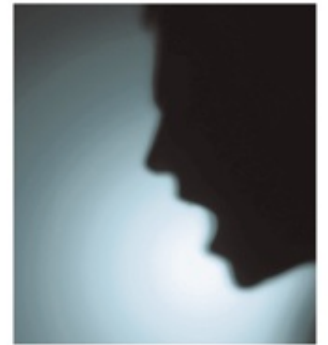
## THE DOUBLE

The monster convinces Victor that he should have a companion, arguing that he is malicious because he is miserable (p. 147). He turns on Victor's family and friends because they represent to Victor what Victor has denied to him: the comforts of domestic affection. But in so far as the monster is Victor's **double**, the expression of a split within his psyche, the monster is murdering all those whom Victor has already attempted to cut off in his obsessive search for the secret of life. In this respect, he may represent Victor's own aggressive instincts, his fears of the family and of women (see **Themes**).

## KEY QUOTATIONS: THE MONSTER

A01

- The question posed by the monster's education: 'What was I?' (pp. 123, 124).
- The monster after being rejected by the De Laceys: 'I, like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me' (p. 138).



## CRITICAL VIEWPOINT

A03

David Lodge argues that in a novel 'names are never neutral. They always signify, if it is only ordinariness' (*The Art of Fiction*, 1993, p. 37). In terms of the monster's search for identity, then, it must also signify that Shelley does not give him a name at all.

## CHECK THE FILM

A03

Whereas Shelley's monster not only speaks but also speaks eloquently, the majority of film adaptations, beginning with James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), make the monster mute. This of course means he cannot tell his side of the story. It could be argued that this reduces the complexity of the monster and the novel as a whole.

## HOW TO WRITE HIGH-QUALITY RESPONSES

The quality of your writing – how you express your ideas – is vital for getting a higher grade, and AO1 and AO2 are specifically about how you respond.

### FIVE KEY AREAS

The quality of your responses can be broken down into five key areas.

#### 1. THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ANSWER/ESSAY

- First, get **straight to the point or focus in your opening paragraph**. Use a sharp, direct first sentence that deals with a key aspect and then follow up with evidence or detailed reference.
- **Put forward an argument or point of view** (you won't always be able to challenge or take issue with the essay question, but generally, where you can, you are more likely to write in an interesting way).
- **Signpost your ideas** with connectives and references which help the essay flow.
- **Don't repeat points already made**, not even in the conclusion, unless you have something new to add.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

AO1

Consider the following essay question:

**Discuss how the De Lacey family exemplifies the 'amiableness of domestic affection' to which Percy Shelley refers in his Preface.**

Here's an example of an opening paragraph that gets straight to the point:

*The De Lacey family initially seems to offer the main example in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" of what Percy Shelley calls the 'amiableness of the domestic affection' (p. 12). Here all work and all rewards are shared equally. There is an atmosphere of mutual concern and difference, as the inclusion of the Turkish Safie seems to suggest, can be accepted. Safie, however, has beauty on her side; the monster does not. Rather than idealising this world, Shelley ultimately suggests it only survives because of its terrible insularity. The De Lacey family function only through excluding anything that appears to threaten their own personal security.*

Immediate focus on task and key words and example from text

#### 2. USE OF TITLES, NAMES, ETC.

This is a simple, but important, tip to stay on the right side of the examiners.

- Make sure that you spell correctly the titles of the texts, chapters, authors and so on. Present them correctly too, with double quotation marks and capitals as appropriate. For example, 'In Volume One of "Frankenstein" ...'.
- Use the **full title**, unless there is a good reason not to (e.g. it's very long).
- Use the term 'text' rather than 'book' or 'story'. If you use the word 'story', the examiner may think you mean the plot/action rather than the 'text' as a whole.

#### EXAMINER'S TIP

Answer the question set, not the question you'd like to have been asked! Examiners say that often students will be set a question on one character (for example, Elizabeth Lavenza) but end up writing almost as much about another (such as the monster). Or they write about one aspect from the question (for example, the nature of the monstrous) but ignore another (such as the nature of the human). **Stick to the question**, and answer **all parts of it**.

### 3. EFFECTIVE QUOTATIONS

Do not 'bolt on' quotations to the points you make. You will get some marks for including them, but examiners will not find your writing very fluent.

The best quotations are:

- Relevant
- Not too long
- Integrated into your argument/sentence

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

AO1

Here is an example of a quotation successfully embedded in a sentence:

*Walton's exploration of the Arctic is in part a quest to conquer nature, to penetrate and 'proceed over the untamed yet obedient element' (p. 24).*

Remember – quotations can be a well-selected set of three or four single words or phrases embedded in a sentence to build a picture or explanation, or they can be longer ones that are explored and picked apart.

#### 4. TECHNIQUES AND TERMINOLOGY

By all means mention literary terms, techniques, **conventions** or people (for example, 'paradox' or 'archetype' or 'Prometheus') **but** make sure that you:

- Understand what they mean
- Are able to link them to what you're saying
- Spell them correctly!

#### 5. GENERAL WRITING SKILLS

Try to write in a way that sounds professional and uses standard English. This does not mean that your writing will lack personality – just that it will be authoritative.

- Avoid colloquial or everyday expressions such as 'got', 'alright', 'ok' and so on.
- Use terms such as 'convey', 'suggest', 'imply', 'infer' to explain the writer's methods.
- Refer to 'we' when discussing the audience/reader.
- Avoid assertions and generalisations; don't just state a general point of view (*The women in the text are all passive ...*), but analyse closely with clear evidence and textual detail.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

AO1

For example, note the professional approach here:

*"Frankenstein" clearly conveys the centrality of the visual to the monstrous. Even the creature is horrified when he encounters his own reflection in a pool and becomes 'fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am' (p. 116). In this society, the text suggests, only a blind man, a figure of Blind Justice perhaps, could accept Frankenstein's creature. To a great extent, De Lacey's blindness represents the blindness of the reader. We too do not see the monster and therefore are more concerned with what he says than with how he looks.*

#### EXAMINER'S TIP

Make sure you know how many marks are available for each **Assessment Objective** in the task you are set. This can help you divide up your time or decide how much attention to give each aspect. For example, if your set question or task is worth 40\* marks, and about 50% of these are for how well you cover form, structure and language (**AO2**), you will need to make sure that about half your response deals with them or that you spend about half your time writing about them

*\*This is just an example; check your own specific course for accurate information.*