



## Unit AS 2:

# The Study of Prose pre 1900

## Shelley: Frankenstein

In this Unit there are 4 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03 and A05.

### A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

*In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of a selected novel.*

*This AO involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the novel, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.*

### Plot Summary

#### Letters 1-4

Using a plot framing technique, the novel opens with four letters addressed to a Mrs Saville in England, penned by her brother Robert Walton. Walton speaks of his current problems in finding a ship, crew and ship-master, ready for his journey to the Arctic. In the letters Walton details his difficulties, his desires, his absence of six years and his overriding ambition to be successful in his journey of exploration to the North Pole. Once at sea, Walton continues to document the adventure, telling of the icy weather, the potential dangers and how the ship becomes entrapped in ice. It is when they are stranded in ice that the crew and Walton observe the passing of a huge man on a dogsled. The next day, they discover another man, this one starved and near death. Taken on board, the man begins to recover, but Walton cannot help noting how a sadness weighs on the stranger. The relationship between the men grows, bonded by their Romantic natures, until the stranger decides to relate his tale. Walton listens and makes notes. The exhausted stranger is near the completion of his journey, while Walton is eagerly enthusiastic at the beginning of his quest. The stranger has recognised a kindred ambition – a Promethean ambition – in his rescuer, and hopes Walton will draw an apt moral from his tale.

#### Chapters 1-2: Early Life

The character and experiences of the as yet unnamed Victor Frankenstein are recorded in the first person, through the perspective of Walton.



In stark contrast to the situation he now finds himself in, Frankenstein details an idyllic childhood. He tells of the marriage of his parents, his birth, their subsequent travelling and the adoption of a sister during one of his mother's charitable visits to the poor. He praises his parents for their 'deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life' i.e. himself. The adoption of Elizabeth provides Victor with a playmate, and a "possession". The novel's themes are hinted at in these paragraphs.

Victor's respect, devotion and love for Elizabeth and his friend Henry Clerval are retrospectively emphasised – with the present Frankenstein lamenting the loss of the close friend he once had. A typically Romantic concept – the idea of friendships and responsibility to others – speaks to the pain the stranger is expressing to Walton. The loss of a friend, the pain suffered by a loved one, the wrong-doing in society, all of these pain the Romantic stranger on a spiritual level.

Frankenstein's childhood passes by, filled with increasing curiosity and an appetite for natural philosophy<sup>1</sup>, the world around him, galvanism and any number of other scientific ideas that inflame his imagination.

### Chapters 3-5: Making the Creature

At the age of seventeen, Victor is preparing to attend the University of Ingolstadt, when Elizabeth becomes ill with scarlet fever. Elizabeth survives, but Victor's mother does not – dying from the disease as she assists Elizabeth's recovery. The family's grief is acute, and the death serves to strengthen Frankenstein's belief that he is devoted to a worthy cause: to find the elixir of life, and return life to the dead.

Frankenstein attends University, becoming engaged by the lectures of two opposing professionals. The juxtaposition of the elegance of Professor M. Waldman, against the "gruff" and "repulsive" Professor M. Krempe, establishes a destructive and mistaken link between outer appearance and the inner reality. Frankenstein's narrative speaks of "omens" and the belief in a 'fate' that he feels bound to. The imagery serves to distance the man from responsibility, and helps explain the drive which sees him dedicate two years of his life to the manufacture of a being that will justify his ambition.

Hidden away from sight, and distancing himself from his family, Frankenstein secretly toils over the birth of his eight-foot creation. With images of birth and omnipotence, Shelley shows that Victor is removing the need for woman and for God, but he feels the weight of his 'crime' as he moves among the dead and their graves, desiring to bring the dead back to life. In moments of ecstasy, Victor feels he is bringing light into the darkness, but the moment he brings the creature to life, "the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled [his] heart".

Victor flees immediately – released from his obsession and abhorring his creation. In the night, the creature finds him, and stretches a hand out in friendship. Frankenstein again rejects him and again escapes the scene, fleeing into the city. His wanderings there are aimless and distracted until Clerval finds him. Falling into a stupor, Victor becomes seriously unwell, and in direct contrast to Victor's own lack of compassion for his progeny, Clerval dedicates himself to his friend and nurses him back to health.

<sup>1</sup> The term was replaced by 'science' and 'scientist' in the late 1800s



## Chapters 6-8: Consequences

When well enough to read again, Frankenstein is given a letter from Elizabeth. It details the character of Justine, the servant-girl of the family, and much loved by them for her innocence and goodness. Justine had been taken in by the Frankenstein family and removed from parents who did not perform their role with love.

Frankenstein makes no link with his own responsibilities, but desperate to forget his creation, aligns his interests with Clerval's own literary ones, and in the enjoyment of friendship, and of the restorative power of inanimate nature, he returns to full health. This brief enjoyment is not to last, and with the arrival of a second letter – from Victor's father, Alphonse - it is discovered that the youngest Frankenstein, William, has been murdered. This brings Victor home after a six-year absence. Overwhelmed with grief near his journey's end, Victor takes to foot, and brings himself to the place of the murder. As a violent storm rages, a lightning flash illuminates the presence of "the monster". This is the first time Frankenstein has seen the creature since his rejection of it, and he continues to separate himself from it by using reductive language such as "daemon", "devil" and "animal". Although Victor longs to divorce himself from it permanently, the narrative hints at doppelgangers and the darker side of Frankenstein evident in the very creation before him. Ironically and immediately, Frankenstein is convinced of his creation's guilt in the murder, "The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact", ignoring his own culpability in the creation of the monster's moral nature. To his mind, what he has created can only be inherently evil and malicious. Frankenstein fails to understand the gravity of his own actions in rejecting the creature. What Frankenstein feels is a connection with the death of William – but not a guilt of individual responsibility for his lack of instruction or parenting of his creature.

At the house, his father reveals that their servant Justine is accused of William's murder. Although Victor declares her innocence, he does not reveal the existence of his monstrous creation. Trusting that innocence will prevail, the family attend their servant's trial. Despite the testimony of Elizabeth, the verdict is guilty, with death as punishment. Justine herself, desperate to gain absolution, admits to the crime which she has not committed. Torn by horror and despair, Frankenstein contemplates the destruction of his family and hints that worse is to come.

## Chapters 9-10: Facing the Creature

The Frankenstein family is overwhelmed with grief. The father's health begins to fail, Elizabeth loses faith in humanity – "men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood" – and Victor is racked with profound despair. In a painful irony, Frankenstein recognises that his driving ambition – seeking the elixir of life – has become the very thing which brings death and makes him long for death as well. He feels caught between guilt and desperation for revenge.

Hoping a change of scene will remedy their distress, the family retire to Belrive, in Geneva. Fearful of his creature's continued threat to his family, Victor resists the temptation of suicide, choosing instead to seek the Romantic and restorative powers of nature once more. In the small town of Chamonix among the French Alps, Frankenstein finds a temporary solace in 'maternal nature', stemming the flow of his tears at her command.

The escape into the mountains, and the dehumanising reference to himself as an



“unquiet thing” again suggest the doubling of Victor with his “monster”. They both have found solace in nature – and it is in the mountains that his creature comes to him. Anger and horror make Frankenstein only able to utter threats and execrations. In stark contrast, the creature speaks with an eloquence of phrase that belies and rejects Victor’s pre-judgements. The creature is an intelligent and emotional being, aware of religious and philosophical issues and able to articulate his own feelings and question his reason for being. He attempts to force Frankenstein to accept his parenthood – “I am thy creature”. He recognises that he is a “fallen angel” rather than an Adam. Demanding an audience, the creature begs Frankenstein to hear his tale, placing his hands before his creator’s eyes, so the latter will hear the reality, rather than make assumptions from the appearance. “I am miserable,” the creature explains, and stirred in his own humanity, Frankenstein realizes “for the first time,” and only to a degree, “the duties of a creator towards his creature.”

### Chapters 11-14: The Creature’s Story

The multi-voiced narrative gains another layer in these chapters – with the creature adding his own experiences in a first-person narrative – retold by Frankenstein, recorded by the objective Walton and received by Mrs Saville. The creature offers proof of his story, promising to provide letters of another character’s (Safie’s) experiences – these are then handed to Walton, from Frankenstein himself. The fantastic is grounded in apparent facts, and so the story continues.

The creature tells of his experiences in the two years since Victor rejected him. The articulation of the story from the creature’s own point of view allows Shelley to draw into question Victor’s actions and authority.

The creature tells of beginning life as a benign but unformed being, seeking to come to terms with his existence and his reason. He is the blank slate of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Quickly, he discovers comfort in nature, becomes aware of heat and light, and finds himself rejected by human society – despite his benevolent response to those in need. He finds shelter in a shack attached to the home of the De Lacey family, but keeps his presence secret, having discovered his own reflection to be repulsive and the source of his isolation from society. Judging himself by how he appears to others, he begins to accept that he is a “monster, and a blot on the earth”.

Living in observation of the De Laceys, the creature comes to learn about human beings, their emotions, their connections and their ‘art of language’. He reveals his own natural inclination for morality, virtue and good feelings – all in contrast to Victor’s depiction of him. He learns of the fate of his observed family, the reasons they have been brought low, and their egalitarian acceptance of the outsider Safie. The more he learns of his humans, the more he recognises his own isolation. Knowledge brings both power and powerlessness. It cements his recognition of his own difference and makes him long to be accepted.

### Chapters 15-17

Frankenstein’s creature continues his story, accounting for his developed powers of expression and understanding by his discovery and reading of several works by Milton, Goethe and Plutarch. He also discovers the journal of his creator in the clothes he took from Frankenstein’s laboratory. Again the effect of the knowledge is two-fold – the creature develops emotionally and intellectually, while the recognition of his



abandonment deepens and he curses the name of Frankenstein. He still wishes to belong to the virtuous, and looks for an opportunity of an audience with the De Lacey father.

Hoping that the father's blindness will prohibit a rejection based on physiognomy<sup>2</sup>, the creature seeks out a time when he may speak to the man alone. The moment comes, and the man listens to the creature's tale of woe – only to be interrupted by the returning children. Horrified by the creature's presence, the son Felix throws him from the house, promising the family that they will depart from the cottage at once as it is no longer safe. The creature's pain manifests itself as revenge, and he admits to allowing himself to be carried away by the stream of hatred – setting the cottage alight, and dancing in momentary exultation at its destruction.

His commitment to malignity and evil is not yet complete, as he later saves the life of a drowning girl – only to have his kind act repaid with a bullet wound. Blaming his creator once more, the monster vows “eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind.” Recovering slowly, the creature makes his way to Geneva, in search of a more exact punishment of Frankenstein. Chancing upon a child, he hopes to have discovered someone as yet untainted with the prejudices of society. He is wrong – and the horror of the boy, the violence of the disgust he expresses, combined with the name ‘Frankenstein’ – results in the child's murder. It is William, Victor's brother. The discovery makes the creature's heart swell “with exultation and hellish triumph.” The killing of this innocent, and the casual malignity of pinning the murder on Justine, parallels the injustice which the creature himself endures. Demonised without reason, vilified without understanding, he now finds joy in his power to inflict pain equal to that he has suffered.

For all this, responsibility must fall at the door of Victor Frankenstein. When the creature was made, he was deformed, but not monstrous. His abandonment, repeated abuse and deeply felt misery have been the reason for his transformation, and when he concludes his narrative with a request for the creation of a companion, Frankenstein is forced to question himself and discover a measure of compassion for his victim. Listening to the threat that he should “curse the hour of [his] birth”, should he not comply, Victor is forced to blur the lines of human and monster once more. The creature recognises Frankenstein as his God, his creator, but one who has given him a blighted and not a blessed existence. He laments his loneliness and begs for a companion. Victor initially rejects him, fearful of bringing a second horror into the world. The Monster longs for a companion, which Frankenstein eventually agrees to, so long as the Monster promises to quit all inhabited areas once the female is complete.

Having given this undertaking, Victor returns to his family, knowing that their safety depends on his completion of the task.

## **Chapters 18-19: Making a Mate**

Upon his return home, Victor delays the commencement of his task. He is able for a time to enjoy life once more, putting off his dreaded task and contemplating a journey to England where scientific advancements had been made, but delays again at the repugnance of the thought. When his father approaches the subject of Victor's marriage to Elizabeth, Victor becomes animated – he will journey to England for study and upon his return will immediately wed his childhood companion. Internally he laments the “deadly weight yet hanging round my neck,” which delays his union with

**2** Physiognomy – identification of person's moral nature, in their physical appearance



Elizabeth. Note that the word “marriage” (used by Alphonse) is avoided entirely by Victor, who prefers “union”. So far Victor has played the role of reproducer, possibly fearing the traditional form of creation.

Clerval joins Victor on his travels, and together they journey across Europe – to the increasing awe of the former, “This is what it is to live,” and the reluctant appreciation of Frankenstein, “Even I...even I was pleased.” The Gothic locations aid in their Romantic restoration of Victor’s soul – but this is not to last, and the chapter concludes with a lament prefiguring the death of Clerval.

Returning to his tale, Victor recounts their journey through England and Scotland and their parting in Perth. Frankenstein travels on to the Orkney Islands – a place of Gothic suggestiveness which reflects the desolation of the man’s soul. “It was a place fitted for such a work” as he was to undertake. The location speaks to a recognition of the nature of his task: forbidden and unfit for human eyes to witness.

Fighting his foreboding, Frankenstein begins the task, but without the fervour of old: “It became everyday more horrible and irksome to me”. With a sickened heart, he pushes on.

### **Chapters 20-21: Clerval’s Murder**

As he commits himself to the creation of the female, Frankenstein is racked with fears for the consequences. On the point of success he finds himself tearing her apart before the very eyes of his first creation. The Monster is distraught, howling in agony. Later, he returns to fight Frankenstein’s decision. Defiant, Victor hears the threats, “You are my creator, but I am your master; – obey!”, and is unmoved. He will not unleash another malignity onto the earth. The desolation of the Monster is complete; he endures the ultimate rejection of humanity – a denial from his own creator. He counters with rage and a promise of revenge, ‘I shall be with you on your wedding night’. Obtusely, Victor interprets this as a threat to himself, unaware of the threat to his wife-to-be. He feels despair, but is firm in his decision.

A letter arrives from Clerval, seeking a reunion. Victor plans to be ready before a second day passes, and to this end takes his instruments and the ruined female out to sea. Disposing of the evidence, he falls asleep, waking some hours later to find he has drifted as far as the Irish coast. There he stands immediately accused of murder. (Note how the narrative offers almost an itinerary of wild and Romantic locations.) The description of the murdered victim is all too familiar – and upon being brought to witness the body Victor collapses in agony – it is his friend, Henry Clerval. Two months later, Frankenstein recovers to find himself still unwell, and imprisoned. The local magistrate has been kind, and despite Victor’s delirious insistence on his own culpability, believes in his innocence. During Victor’s illness, Alphonse has arrived at the magistrate’s request. Victor is exculpated, although his conscience continues to feel the guilt. He feels both complicit and victimised, and the lines of division between monster and maker continue to be questioned. Rejected, isolated and miserable – both man and monster declare themselves victims of their poisoned relationship.

### **Chapters 22-23: ‘I shall be with you on your wedding night’**

As father and son make their way back to Geneva, Victor receives a letter from Elizabeth, freeing him from their engagement if that is what he would prefer. Victor responds immediately, declaring her to be his beloved. Victor continues to



understand his responsibility for the earlier murders, “I am the assassin of those most innocent victims”, and although believing the date is set for his own demise, he agrees to the marriage, hoping to provide some happiness for both Alphonse and Elizabeth. She suspects, and Victor acknowledges the existence of a secret. He promises to reveal it the day after their marriage, and Elizabeth, obediently, does not press him again – despite her fears.

The marriage takes place and the pair break their wedding journey at an inn that night. The weather is tranquil, but there is unspoken disquiet between the newlyweds, despite Victor’s attempts to soothe any fears. Arming himself for a confrontation with the Monster, Victor sends Elizabeth to bed and checks the house for the creature’s presence as the weather becomes turbulent. It is not until he hears Elizabeth’s screams that the Monster’s “hellish intention” becomes clear to him. Victor has become the victim of his own self-absorption. The reader has long anticipated the outcome of this night – an attack on Elizabeth, not on Victor.

The grief of Alphonse, following Elizabeth’s murder, brings him to his own death-bed. Victor’s mind betrays him, and he is committed to an asylum to recover. Some months later he attends upon a magistrate and unfolds the entire tale of the Monster, the murder of his family members, and the need to find the murderer. He is heard, but the magistrate claims that capture of the monster would be impossible. Thus abandoned, Victor is dismayed but not dissuaded. He will seek another way.

## **Chapter 24 and Walton’s Letters: Aftermath**

Before Victor begins his search for the Monster, he visits the graves of his family. Exclaiming aloud an oath of vengeance, he hears a “fiendish laugh”. The pursuit begins. Travelling throughout Europe, Russia and eventually the Arctic Frankenstein is single-minded in his aim, ignoring the creature’s occasional overtures to him. He is supported by the generosity of locals, and what he called “a spirit of good”.

When Walton discovers him, Victor is close to death. Following his recovery and the recording of his story, Walton returns to his own first-person narrative. The incredible is made credible in the belief of Walton, in the proof of the letters and the corrections made to them by Frankenstein, and in Walton’s records. He continues to pen letters to his sister, and comments on the location of the ship, the fear of the men, Victor’s declining health and ultimate death. Before he dies, Victor releases Walton from a promise to take up the mantle of the search. In his letters Walton reports a recognition of responsibility in Frankenstein. He is still determined to find and destroy the wretch, but is also able to acknowledge his own guilt.

Following Frankenstein’s death, Walton comes face to face with the Monster. He finds him hideous but listens to him. “I was the slave, not the master,” the creature protests. His change from virtue to violence was forced upon him, he claims. This change he “detested, yet could not disobey”. Walton feels sympathy for the creature, and appreciates his ability to take blame for Victor’s suffering. All he wishes now is release. In a final reference to the power of fire and ice, the Monster reveals his desire to build a funeral pyre on the ice and ascend it. He shall have his peace, at the last, “lost in darkness and distance”.

## **Themes**

Key themes have been indicated by underlining throughout the above summary.



## A02: Narrative methods

*In this examination, the candidate should analyse the writer's use of such narrative methods as form, structure and language.*

*The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in novels. This means identifying narrative methods and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.*

Discussing narrative methods - advice to teachers and students:

As this unit is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail which can be provided in the time available. It is anticipated that the larger-scale features of form, structure and language will be most useful in constructing a relevant response in the time available.

A few general stylistic features:

### **Framing Narrative**

The narrative structure of *Frankenstein* is complex in its use of a framing narrative and further embedded narratives. The epistolary narrative of letters sent by Walton to his sister Mrs Saville opens the story, a linear narrative that is interrupted by the arrival and narration of the next voice – Frankenstein, who appears in the midst of his own personal story. Through a series of flashbacks, we hear the testimony of his life and are brought up to the current time. The grounded nature of Walton's character and his belief in the words of Victor help to make the narrative believable. There then follows a return to the letter-writing of earlier before the story concludes. Within the narrative of Frankenstein, there is a break to allow the entrance of the third voice – that of his creation.

The narrative of the story is deliberately broken, and lacking in completeness. No one voice gets to own and complete the entire story – rather, the continual shift of the narrative perspective encourages the creation of links and parallels between characters. The first-person perspectives of the overarching tale are purposefully moved and shifted in order to relate the tale from the best 'angle', and the resulting narrative rises above the individual accounts provided and presents a fuller and more complete account of the circumstances.

### **Symbolism: Light and Fire**

The Ancient Greek myth of Prometheus is a tale with two versions – both applicable to *Frankenstein*. In one, Prometheus provides humans with the fire, stolen from the gods; in the other, he creates, from clay, the first human. In both tales, he has overstretched his allotted powers; in both tales, he is subjected to unceasing torture.

It is within flashes of light and during storms that the Monster is born and continues to appear and to hunt Victor, and only when they reach the Arctic is an end in sight. It is the ice which will bring death – something which Victor experiences, Walton promises to try to avoid, and the Monster wishes to embrace. He places himself in the power of the elements, wishing to harness both fire and ice to end his own existence.



## Allusions

The seventeenth-century epic poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, and the Bible were just two of the literary works alluded to in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Both are key in illuminating the ideas of creation, of belonging and acceptance.

In taking on the role of creator, Frankenstein denies the need for either mother or God in the process of creation. His arrogance is justly punished. His creation comes to understand that he should be an Adam, and deserves an Eve. Having read Milton's work, the Monster is further able to see the denial by Frankenstein in terms of a rejection from heaven. In consequence he casts himself – unwillingly – in the role of Satan, rather than the beloved Adam. As Lucifer turned against his God, committed himself to a war and was condemned to live in exile, so too the Monster turns against his creator and is exiled from happiness.



## A03: Contexts

*In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a novel is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the novel.*

*No particular type of context will be stipulated in the question. However, contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.*

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students. It reflects some of the contextual areas which might be found useful. Remember the remarks above about balancing text and context in a response.

### **Literary Context**

Shelley's *Frankenstein* is commonly thought of as a Gothic horror novel – although the typical conventions of this genre are subverted and parodied. It has also been described as a science-fiction novel – written several decades before such a genre even existed. The world of which Shelley writes is a real, secular and actual world – not the haunted, ghost-ridden castles and lonely ruins of the Gothic novel. The danger Shelley highlights is the potentially terrifying use of science to create life – and what our reactions would be to that circumstance. By the end of the novel the science has been forgotten, and Frankenstein's "scientific" creation has transformed into a vision of Gothic horror.

### **Biographical context**

Both of Shelley's parents were thinkers and writers, and their daughter grew up in a world that celebrated intellectual activity. Living in a house that opened its doors to the best minds of the era, permitted access to an enormous library and provided with a strong education, the teenage Mary Shelley was enabled to create a masterful piece of literature in *Frankenstein*.

The writings of Shelley's parents – Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin – made a lasting impact on their daughter and her writing. Following the Revolution in France and the continued hostilities between Britain and its neighbour, both parents were outspoken in their support for change, progress and the rebuttal of tradition. Mary Wollstonecraft's famous work demanded that women should be viewed as rational and capable beings. In *Frankenstein*, the disastrous rejection of the need for women and the limitation of the role of Elizabeth could be seen as a continued argument in support of her mother's warnings. Shelley's father wrote of the potential for the ideal society if every human being performed a moral and rational role.

### **Social-Historical Context**

The scientific and technological developments of the Enlightenment are fully embraced by Frankenstein. His time at university opens the analytical doors of the



Enlightenment even further – encouraging him to reach beyond the boundaries of nature, and disregard the sacrilegious nature of creating a living being. Shelley’s criticism is acute. To think critically and logically without the influence of all things that make us human is a dangerous denial. The developments imagined by the Enlightenment were often well-intentioned – Frankenstein wishes to stem the pain of death by creating life – but such ambition should be tempered by a humane responsibility and consideration of the consequences.

The Romantic movement was important in this tempering of unchecked scientific and technological advancement. It stood for an appreciation of nature (for itself, and not just for gain), an acknowledgment of the human soul, and a desire to rule justly, recognizing human rights and not ignoring these in favour of material improvements.



## A05: Argument and interpretation

*In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the text, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument. This AO is the driver of Unit AS 2 and is of primary importance.*

*A05 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be:*

- *used with understanding*
- *incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion*
- *not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion*
- *properly acknowledged.*

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing, development and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

It might also be helpful to note that in the predecessor of this unit examiners frequently regretted the sacrifice of quality to quantity in responses.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the thematic, stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.

### Specimen question:

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is little more than a science-fiction story.

With reference to the narrative methods used in the novel, and relevant contextual information, **show to what extent** you agree with the above statement.

In order to construct a meaningful and cogent argument (and to move beyond making simple assertions and offering unsupported opinions), students should use A02 and A03 elements to support and enhance their point of view. Convincing arguments will be based on a secure understanding of *how* Shelley has used narrative methods (A02) to convey her message. Students will also encounter difficulties in presenting an argument which is focused on the stimulus statement without knowledge of the context(s) in which the novel is written and received (A03).

A few relevant points are listed below. Some of these will come to mind at once. Some are the product of a little reflection. These will enable the student to establish a basis for his/her argument, and can then be matched with the novel itself and the narrative methods which Shelley uses.



## Literary Context on the nature of Science Fiction

- The novel predates a conception of the science-fiction genre. Should be viewed as a work involving the use of science, and not attempting to conform to the particulars of the genre.
- Knowledge of the science involved in the story
  - Eighteenth and nineteenth century fascination with exploration and experimentation
  - Galvanism – electric currents to stimulate muscle movement
  - Purpose of body-snatching
  - Practice of vivisection (dissecting live animals for science)
  - Ambitions of Polar expeditions
- Nature of science fiction as a genre
  - A yet unimagined or discovered world (Shelley's world is tangible, and present)
  - An interest in technology (soon disregarded and eventually feared)
  - Interest in doubling/doppelgangers (powerful theme throughout)
  - Moralising strain throughout narrative (distinguishable in *Frankenstein*)
  - Avoidance of supernatural, and posits an explanation in terms of real or imagined science
  - Used for social criticism (e.g. in novel, warning against full embrace of the scientific optimism of the Enlightenment)

Other contextual areas/information will of course be accepted provided relevance is demonstrated.

A good response will take account of some of the above, showing the narrative methods used by Shelley. It is not necessary for the student wholly to agree or disagree with the stimulus statement. Probably a qualified answer will emerge. Such a response, for example might claim that while Shelley does mention some modern scientific interests, her own interest was directed more towards questions of ethics and responsibility, and that the splitting of the narrative, by allowing the reader access to the Monster's interior life, facilitated her authorial intention.

