



Answers to tasks

Task 5

In the Bible, high places are often related to power and revelation. How do you find these ideas useful in reading *Frankenstein*?

Several high places are significant in the novel.

The Arctic: this may be taken as a high place on the Earth, being in the high latitudes; it is a place of revelation for Frankenstein, the monster and Walton, who all encounter deep truths there about themselves and the impact that these truths have on their existence. Frankenstein is at last truthfully and completely able to tell his tale, and is able to unburden himself of the terrible events his arrogance and foolishness have set in motion. The monster is finally able to express his emotional attachment to his flawed creator, once Victor has died. Walton is provided with the revelation of Victor's cautionary tale. He sees in Victor a kindred spirit, and as such a terrible warning for what he has the potential to become.

The mountain glacier where Frankenstein and the monster meet in Chamounix: the meeting between Frankenstein and the monster on the glacier also provides some significant revelations. Victor is brought face to face with the outcomes and the consequences of his presumption in creating the monster. He has revealed to him the full extent of his obligations as a creator and the extent to which he has failed to live up to these obligations. He also faces the revelation of the monster's role in the murder of William. By his manner and through his tale, the monster is also revealed to be a creature capable of good, love and refinement. The glacier is also a place where power becomes evident, however. In a reversal of roles, the monster makes very clear to Frankenstein who is the master, and who truly wields power — physical, moral and mental. It is here that the lines of battle are first drawn as the monster lays down an ultimatum for Victor — in agreeing to create the monster a companion, Victor succumbs to the monster's superior power.

The garret room where Victor creates the monster: this is a room of revelations, being the place where Victor undertakes his experiments. Like the Tower of Babel in the Bible, this is a place of presumption where man strives to reach the mysteries of heaven. As the scene of Victor's presumptuous and foolish work of creation, it is a place of revelation and a place of striving after forbidden powers.



Task 6

Think of occasions in the novel when characters either look out of places they do not wish to be or look in on places where they do wish to be. Take two or three of these situations and compare the effects Shelley achieves through them.

The monster watching the de Lacey's from his hovel: from his secret hiding place next to the de Lacey's cottage, the monster looks longingly into their world of love and pleasant domesticity. Even though they face hardship, the monster envies them the love and companionship that characterises their home, which contrasts so sharply with his own isolation and rejection. This is symbolic of the monster's relationship with humanity in general, as he sits on the sidelines unable to participate in society.

The monster looking through the window as he sees the destruction of his companion: this is a poignant scene when Frankenstein destroys his already long-delayed work on the monster's companion. The monster, as is his lot in life, is banished to the outside and can only look on as Frankenstein destroys the companion he has been creating for the monster and with it any hope that he may escape his terrible loneliness. The monster is overcome first with grief, then anger and the desire for vengeance.

Victor looking out of the window to see the monster gloating over his discovery of Elizabeth's corpse: this scene clearly mirrors that where the monster watches the destruction of his companion. The murder of Elizabeth is his revenge for Frankenstein's destruction of his companion. This time instead of seeing a face etched with frustration and anger, Frankenstein sees the monster's face twisted in vengeful glee. Frankenstein is looking out on the face of his future.

The monster as a watching, stalking presence following Victor across Europe: after their meeting on the glacier at Chamounix, the monster promises to be with Frankenstein wherever he goes, watching for the fulfilment of his promise to make him a companion. We are always aware of the brooding, watchful presence of the monster in the novel.

Task 17

Victor Frankenstein compares himself directly to the mariner by quoting Coleridge's poem:

Like one, on a lonesome road who,
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And, having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

In what ways does this help you understand Victor's character?

This stanza from Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is quoted in full by Victor, so he clearly sees it as an apt summary of his own situation. Remember that, like the mariner to the wedding guest in the poem, Victor is almost compelled to tell his story to Walton. After so long having to keep his tale within — he repeatedly wishes to tell his tale, or tries to, only to be faced by disbelief — he is relieved to have the opportunity to unburden himself (as the mariner needs to be unburdened of the albatross). The comparisons to Victor's situation in this stanza abound:

He treads a lonesome path — at first this is by his own choice in going to Ingolstadt and pursuing the line of scientific research he did — choices which isolated him knowingly from his family and friends. As the novel progresses, however, his loneliness is enforced upon him as a dreadful consequence of his rashness and his refusal to care for the monster he has created.

Once he becomes aware of the monster and its murderous intentions, Frankenstein walks in constant fear and dread. He is fearful of the immediate consequences of his actions for himself and his family, and for the more global consequences of his choices should he create a female companion and propagate a new race of monsters. Frankenstein can never escape this fear and dread.

Once he knows the monster is on his trail, Frankenstein cannot look back. The actions he has committed are irreversible and the consequences remain.