



# FRANKENSTEIN: RESPONSIBILITY: MODEL ANSWER

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## FRANKENSTEIN: REPOSIBILITY: QUESTION

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Read this extract from *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* and then answer the question that follows.

This extract from chapter III, focuses on the period after Victor attended a lecture in chemistry by a professor named Waldman. This lecture, along with a subsequent meeting with the professor, convinces Victor to pursue his studies in the sciences.

No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, & which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.

These thoughts supported my spirits, while I pursued my undertaking with unremitting ardour. My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realize. One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself, and the moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit.

Starting with this extract, how does Shelley present the theme of responsibility.

Write about:

- how Shelley presents the theme of responsibility in this extract.
- how Shelley presents the theme of responsibility in the rest of the novel.

**[30 marks]**

650 – 950 words





## FRANKENSTEIN: RESPONSIBILITY ANSWER OUTLINE

### ESSAY OUTLINE

#### *Introduction*

Hook	A rich theme running through Mary Shelley's <i>Frankenstein</i> is responsibility.
Building sentences	In a straightforward—even didactic—way, the novel chronicles the devastating consequences for an inventor and those he loves of his utter failure to anticipate the harm that can result from raw, unchecked scientific curiosity.
Thesis statement	The novel not only explores the responsibility that Victor Frankenstein has for the destruction caused by his creation but also examines the responsibility he owes to him.

#### *Body paragraph 1*

Topic sentence	Victor causes the monster to exist; he builds him, freely and with the hope, indeed the intention, that he will come to life.
Supporting sentences	Initially, Victor anticipates his future responsibility for the existence of the creature with pleasure and excitement—even triumph: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source...” However, the phrase ‘bless me’ suggests that his ambitions are self-centred, similar to Walton’s; additionally, they contrast the monster’s humbler ambition, which is to develop relationships with others. The contrast here helps to emphasise Victor’s error in failing to think harder about the potential repercussions of his work. Although he says that he hesitated for a long time about how to use the “astonishing” power to “bestow animation upon lifeless matter”, this hesitation is due to the many technical hurdles that he needed to overcome rather than to any concern for the questionable results of success. He considers the good that might come from his discovery, reflecting the prevailing mood of the Age of Enlightenment that anything might be possible; for example, it might lead to development of a method for bringing the dead back to life; however, Victor fails to consider the future of his initial experimental creation. Although he is aware that the single-minded pursuit of his scientific goals is throwing his life out





	of balance, he utterly fails to consider the possibility that the form he has stitched together and will soon animate may go on to cause harm to anyone, including Victor himself.
Concluding sentence(s)	Perhaps Victor’s experiments suggest that Shelley wants scientists to consider the potential for harm of their creations.

*Body paragraph 2*

Topic sentence	However, on his deathbed, Victor finally acknowledges that he is not just responsible for the creature but also responsible to him: “I ... was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being”.
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Supporting sentences	The creature himself makes this argument forcefully when he confronts Victor in the mountains overlooking the Chamonix Valley. The creature relates all that has transpired since Victor abandoned him. He has learned to find food and shelter. By closely observing a human family, he has learned about emotion and relationships as well as how to speak and read. By finding a collection of books, he learns the rudiments of human society and history. Yet on each attempt to engage with humans, the creature is disastrously rejected—sometimes even attacked. He learns that humans are repulsed by him. By having her inventor create a sentient being—in particular one whose intellect and emotions rival or surpass those of her supposed protagonist— Mary sharpens the point about the responsibility that we might owe to our creations. Parents understand this point (and in many ways Victor is placed in the role of a parent—albeit one who rejects and abandons his child). And so must scientists working to create new or modified life-forms carry a responsibility to their creations. We can take the point even further: a sense of responsibility can be experienced by anyone who pours time and energy into a project, even if that project does not result in a new life form.
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Concluding sentence(s)	We can legitimately speak about feeling an obligation to our work— including to our results, our ideas, or our findings—that it deserves to be published or further developed or recognized as valuable not only because it can benefit others or result in glory for ourselves but because of the intrinsic value of new knowledge.
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*Body paragraph 3 (OPTIONAL)*

Topic sentence	
Supporting sentences	
Concluding sentence(s)	





## Conclusion

Restated thesis	In conclusion, the novel not only explores the responsibility that Victor Frankenstein has for the destruction caused by his creation but also examines the responsibility he owes to him.
Summary of controlling concept	However, Mary Shelley’s landmark fusion of science, ethics, and literary expression does not necessarily appear designed to scare her readers into believing that all science is evil or monstrous; however, she does appear to encourage us to consider the repercussions of scientific and technological advancement. Although Frankenstein is infused with the exhilaration of seemingly unbounded human creativity, the novel also prompts serious reflection about our individual and collective responsibility for nurturing the products of our creativity and whether or not we should impose constraints on our capacities to change the world around us. This is reflected when Mary cautions against Victor’s myopic perspective that creation—bringing into existence— is all that matters;
Author’s purpose	here, Shelley appears to suggest that just because we can create, doesn’t mean we should. Appropriately, Shelley’s choice of the Gothic mode for Frankenstein helps explore Victorian fears that scientific hubris would tempt people to play God (and, perhaps, try to replace God) through the growing power of unconstrained scientific creation - a fear which lives on in more modern literary forms such as in William Golding’s nuclear war dystopian novel ‘Lord of the Flies’ and the apocalyptic future war nightmare of the killer machines in the Terminator movies.
Final thought (what idea/message can we learn?)	Thus, engaging with Frankenstein allows a broad public - and especially future scientists and engineers - to consider the history of our scientific progress together with our expanding abilities in the future, to reflect on evolving understandings of the responsibilities such abilities entail, as well as to question how much restraint and responsibility we should bear for the creations we bring into this world; Shelley’s novel calls us to be accountable for what we create and what might be destroyed in the process of creating.

### MAKE SURE YOUR ESSAY CONTAINS ALL OF THESE QUALITIES

Tick these off when you have added them to your essay

- Methods - author’s techniques
- Context
- Effects of the author’s methods on the audience/reader
- Link to another part of the text - talk about the meaning of the connection
- Symbolism
- Themes





- Author's purpose





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## FRANKENSTEIN: RESPONSIBILITY: 100% MODEL ANSWER

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A rich theme running through Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is responsibility. In a straightforward—even didactic—way, the novel chronicles the devastating consequences for an inventor and those he loves of his utter failure to anticipate the harm that can result from raw, unchecked scientific curiosity. The novel not only explores the responsibility that Victor Frankenstein has for the destruction caused by his creation but also examines the responsibility he owes to him.

Victor causes the monster to exist; he builds him, freely and with the hope, indeed the intention, that he will come to life. Initially, Victor anticipates his future responsibility for the existence of the creature with pleasure and excitement—even triumph: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source...” However, the phrase ‘bless me’ suggests that his ambitions are self-centred, similar to Walton’s; additionally, they contrast the monster’s humbler ambition, which is to develop relationships with others. The contrast here helps to emphasise Victor’s error in failing to think harder about the potential repercussions of his work and, perhaps, reflecting the idea that the text is a response to the Age of Enlightenment (ca. 1650 – 1795) which promoted Humanism, scientific and social progress, a retreat from impassioned religiosity, and a reverence for reason, logic, scientific method, coolheaded-ness, and methodical rather than reactionary responses to social issues of the day. Moreover, although Victor says that he hesitated for a long time about how to use the “astonishing” power to “bestow animation upon lifeless matter”, this hesitation is due to the many technical hurdles that he needed to overcome rather than to any concern for the questionable results of success. He considers the good that might come from his discovery, for example, it might lead to development of a method for bringing the dead back to life; however, Victor fails to consider the future of his initial experimental creation. Although he is aware that the single-minded pursuit of his scientific goals is throwing his life out of balance, he utterly fails to consider the possibility that the form he has stitched together and will soon animate may go on to cause harm to anyone, including Victor himself. Perhaps Victor’s experiments suggest that Shelley wants scientists to consider the potential for harm of their creations.

However, on his deathbed, Victor finally acknowledges that he is not just responsible for the creature but also responsible to him: “I ... was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being”. The creature himself makes this argument forcefully when he confronts Victor in the mountains overlooking the Chamonix Valley. The creature relates all that has transpired since Victor abandoned him. He has learned to find food and shelter. By closely observing a human family, he has learned about emotion and relationships as well as how to speak and read. By finding a collection of books, he learns the rudiments of human society and history. Yet on each attempt to engage with humans, the creature is disastrously rejected—sometimes even attacked. He learns that humans are repulsed by him. By having her inventor create a sentient being—in particular one whose intellect and emotions rival or surpass those of her supposed protagonist—Mary sharpens the point about the responsibility that we might owe to our creations. Parents understand this point (and in many ways Victor is placed in the role of a parent—albeit one who rejects and abandons his child). And so must scientists working to create new or modified life-forms carry a responsibility to their creations. We can take the point even further: a sense of responsibility can be experienced by anyone who pours time and energy into a project, even if that project does not result in a new life form. We can legitimately speak about feeling an obligation to our work—including to our results, our ideas, or our findings—that it deserves to be published or further developed or recognized as valuable not only because it can benefit others or result in glory for ourselves but because of the intrinsic value of new knowledge.

In conclusion, the novel not only explores the responsibility that Victor Frankenstein has for the destruction caused by his creation but also examines the responsibility he owes to him. However, Mary Shelley’s landmark fusion of science, ethics, and literary expression does not necessarily appear designed to scare her readers into believing that all science is evil or monstrous; however, she does appear to encourage us to consider the repercussions of scientific and technological advancement. Although *Frankenstein* is infused with the exhilaration of seemingly unbounded human creativity, the novel also prompts serious





reflection about our individual and collective responsibility for nurturing the products of our creativity and whether or not we should impose constraints on our capacities to change the world around us. This is reflected when Mary cautions against Victor's myopic perspective that creation—bringing into existence— is all that matters; here, Shelley appears to suggest that just because we can create, doesn't mean we should. Appropriately, Shelley's choice of the Gothic mode for Frankenstein helps explore Victorian fears that scientific hubris would tempt people to play God (and, perhaps, try to replace God) through the growing power of unconstrained scientific creation - a fear which lives on in more modern literary forms such as in William Golding's nuclear war dystopian novel 'Lord of the Flies' and the apocalyptic future war nightmare of the killer machines in the Terminator movies. Thus, engaging with Frankenstein allows a broad public - and especially future scientists and engineers - to consider the history of our scientific progress together with our expanding abilities in the future, to reflect on evolving understandings of the responsibilities such abilities entail, as well as to question how much restraint and responsibility we should bear for the creations we bring into this world; Shelley's novel calls us to be accountable for what we create and what might be destroyed in the process of creating.

