ENGL 2160 201 Monsters, Apes, and Nightmares: The Year of FRANKENSTEIN

Fall 2018  M 3:30-6:20  McGauvran 313 (SC)
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Office Hours: I am regularly in my office, or in the English Department, this semester, though my weekly schedule will change. Feel free to drop by any time. You might also check with Jacqueline_Ledoux@uml.edu to confirm my availability at a specific time. Also, you can schedule an appointment either directly with me (preferably in person or by email) or through Jacky.

Course Description:
The year 2018 marks the bicentennial of one of the modern world’s great myths. It is a story, and an image, that gives meaning to our experiences and makes sense of the world. Mary Shelley’s novel Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus was published in January 2018, just after Shelley had turned 20 years old. As the first science fiction novel in English literature, Frankenstein remains a relevant, and perhaps even an increasingly urgent, commentary on the nature of human life in the science-driven, technologically sophisticated modern world. It epitomizes the ethical critique of morally irresponsible, “Promethean” science and technology. It also contains powerful explorations of a host of themes that resonate no less urgently for us in 2018 than they did for the book’s author two hundred years ago: fundamental human themes of love and death and friendship, and parental responsibility and abandonment and failure, and generational conflict and the aims of education and social obligation and the healing power of nature—and many more. In short, this novel written in little more than a year by a teenaged Englishwoman at the beginning of the nineteenth century represents one of the most powerful and widely, indeed globally, known efforts to make sense of and to shape public attitudes toward the condition of modernity—what life is like in the modern world. The idea of Frankenstein is larger than Mary Shelley, larger than the eponymous creator or his monstrous creation, larger than the novel itself. Try to imagine the world without Frankenstein—novel, creator, or creation—and you will see how thoroughly Shelley’s creation permeates modern life.

In his Introduction to the edition of Frankenstein that will be your bible in this class for the next four months, the artist and filmmaker Guillermo del Toro makes the following astute observation:

“Frankenstein” stands alongside that rarest of breeds—the literary figure that transcends its source. These figures are used colloquially to represent a concept, or many, and become an idiom. Dracula, Tarzan, Holmes, Watson—each of them has now been worshipped in as many mediums as we can consume—illustrated books, comics, film, television, radio, plays, figurines, statues, toys, street names, municipalities—and can be used in our vernacular: “He is a regular __________,” we say, and are understood even by those who have only the vaguest notions of the literary source. (xiii)

Del Toro’s point is that, in one way or another, we all know Frankenstein, we all have a sense of what that word means, whether we’ve read Shelley’s book or not. In this class, we will gain a clear understanding of the literary source of the Frankenstein myth—Mary Shelley’s novel itself.

But Frankenstein, as a myth, is larger than Shelley’s text. It emerged from specific biographical, historical, social, political, and cultural contexts; and it has had a rich afterlife. For these reasons, we will also explore some of the historical background of the novel, and we will read, view, discuss, and research some of the many continuing representations and uses of Frankenstein in popular culture. By the end of the semester, my hope is that you will have arrived at an understanding of Frankenstein the text and Frankenstein the person (or people) and “Frankenstein” the concept that is thorough and detailed—and at an understanding of why this story continues to matter, why it remains one of the most powerful of modern myths.
So, by the end of this semester, you will know who and what *Frankenstein* (and Frankenstein, and “Frankenstein”) is; and you will have developed a meaningful appreciation of the continuing relevance of Frankenstein as a modern myth. In order to achieve these ends, we will do the following:

1. Read *Frankenstein*. Patiently, slowly, carefully. We will devote the first half of the semester to the reading of *Frankenstein*, while supplementing it with films and film clips, and other background material and current news stories. We will also write regularly, as a process of intellectual discovery—and as a process of play!

2. Write about—or make about—*Frankenstein*. I have left the syllabus flexible during the last few weeks of the semester. During this time, we will pursue your interests, your questions, your investments—emotional, intellectual, professional—in themes explored by Mary Shelley in her novel. The purpose of this effort will be to help you produce, as your final project, the best critical or creative work you can, one that will illuminate some vital aspect of *Frankenstein*, and one that will help you, and others, to see as clearly as possible the enduring relevance of *Frankenstein*.

More specifically and practically, by the end of this course you will also have done the following:

- Practiced the skills of close reading and textual interpretation
- Improved your critical writing skills
- Contributed to a vibrant intellectual community devoted to the pursuit of truth by way of clear and precise thinking
- Cultivated your curiosity and, thereby, your ethical capability
- Fulfilled the UMass Lowell Core Curriculum AH requirement as well as the Essential Learning Outcome for SRE (Social Responsibility and Ethics)

**Required Text:**


Google account: subscribe to Google Alerts for “Frankenstein,” and set your account to receive updates at least every day. We will discuss a week’s worth of news stories from this alert each week in class.

**Assignments, Participation, and Grading:**

The reading and writing load for this course is steady. We will read privately and together; in class we will focus on active discussion: on the public, collaborative work of literary criticism and interpretation. We will ask lots of questions, and we will learn how to ask good questions about this material; we will do a lot of close reading of specific passages, and we will learn to read better; we will combine disciplined respect for our texts with vigorous speculation and argument as to their meaning and significance.

I assume as axiomatic that, whatever else you are, as soon as you step into this classroom, you are an intellectual, and therefore that we are a community of intellectuals. As such, we have not only the opportunity to explore landmark texts in a vital arena of human creativity and imagination, but also a responsibility to do our best by them. We are also going to need to help each other out. Come to class, every day, on time, having completed the reading assignments to the best of your ability, and ready to ask questions and to participate in class discussion—in short, ready to contribute to energetic conversations. It is a truth universally acknowledged that there is a positive correlation between attendance (showing up) and performance (grade).

Your final grade will reflect your attendance and participation. All assignments must be submitted as hard copies in class. I will grade and return assignments one week following the due date. I will comment briefly on them, as a participant in a conversation that you initiate with your essay, and I encourage you to visit me
during my scheduled office hours to discuss your grades, my expectations, and any other course issues (as well as simply to continue playing with ideas!).

This course requires the following assignments; your final grade will be based on them, according to the percentages indicated:

**Short ("think") Papers**: 5 short essays (~500 words each, graded on a 100-point scale): **50%**
(I will comment briefly on your short essays and grade them. I will accept late papers, and will grade them without comment.)

**Participation and in-class exercises**: **20%** (Note: This class meets once each week. This means that to miss one class is to miss an entire week’s worth of class time. I will accept one missed class without penalty, though you will be responsible for finding out what was covered and for making up any missed work. A second missed class will result in an automatic reduction of your participation grade by half. A third missed class will seriously jeopardize your final grade, by eliminating the participation and in-class exercise part of the final grade.)

**Final Research or Creative Project**: **30%**

**Total**: **100%**

Your final course grade will follow this numerical scale:
- A = 93-100
- A- = 90-92
- B+ = 87-89
- B = 83-86
- B- = 80-82
- Etc.

**Course Workload:**
This is a three-credit course, as defined by federal regulation. You should expect to complete approximately six hours of work outside class each week over the course of the semester, for a total of 90 hours of work outside of class.

**Instructional Resources:**
The Writing Center, located on the third floor of O’Leary Library, offers free writing tutoring. You can meet with a tutor about any writing assignment in any class. Check out the Writing Center website here: [https://www.uml.edu/Writing-Center/](https://www.uml.edu/Writing-Center/). The Centers for Learning and Academic Support Services (CLASS) provide many tutoring resources; details are available here: [https://www.uml.edu/CLASS/](https://www.uml.edu/CLASS/). Everyone—I mean everyone—needs help with their writing. Good writers are good writers because 1) they read and write a lot, and carefully; 2) they regularly seek help; 3) they understand that the real work of writing happens in the process of revision; 4) they are ruthless in pursuit of their craft. I encourage you to get help if you are struggling with your writing in this or any class at UML. Your student fees support the Writing Center and CLASS services; use them!

**Disability Accommodations:**
In accordance with University policy and the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I will provide accommodation for students with documented disabilities. If you have a physical, learning, or other disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. Their office is in University Crossing, 220 Pawtucket St., Suite #300, phone: 978-934-4574, e-mail: [https://www.uml.edu/student-services/disability/](https://www.uml.edu/student-services/disability/). Documentation of disability is necessary to receive accommodation, and is entirely confidential.
Note on Academic Integrity:
Plagiarism is an act of theft and a serious breach of intellectual and academic integrity. Learn what it is, and read the UMass Lowell policy on academic integrity, here: https://libguides.uml.edu/plagiarism/overview. As a UMass Lowell student, you are responsible for knowing the academic integrity policy, and for acting according to its requirements. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. Any plagiarized paper will earn a grade of “0” (zero). Serious and deliberate offenses (such as including material from websites, or other sources, without attribution) will result in a failing grade for the course and possible further negative consequences, according to the UMass Lowell academic integrity policy. I will be happy to discuss the plagiarism policy in class. However, if you have questions about plagiarism, or about academic integrity in general, that you feel more comfortable asking me directly, then please contact me through e-mail. And remember, if you are feeling pressured, or panicked, or overwhelmed with the course or with life, or if you can’t complete an essay by the due date, and are tempted to plagiarize, it is ALWAYS better to ASK FOR HELP or an extension than to jeopardize your academic career by taking credit for ideas and words that are not your own.

E-mail:
I will use UML SIS e-mail to send important updates, announcements, or other information to the class as a whole—links to news stories and so on. Check your UML e-mail regularly.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments
(All assignments are to be completed for the day listed.)

M 9/10  Introduction to the class and each other; syllabus review and the purpose of this class; in-class writing exercise/workshop

M 9/17  Read: Frankenstein, “Introduction” by Guillermo del Toro and “Foreword” by Leslie S. Klinger
Research: Write brief (50-word) summaries of five stories from the Google Alerts for “Frankenstein” that you received over the previous week. What does the collection of stories we find tell us about the meaning and wide applicability of the term “Frankenstein” today?
Discuss Google Alerts (in class)
View (in class): Thomas Edison Company, Frankenstein (1910)

M 9/24  Read: Frankenstein title page and Preface (1-8) and Appendix 1, “Author’s Introduction”; Frankenstein, Volume I, Letter I-Letter IV (11-34)
Write: Essay 1 Due: What is the moral of Mary Shelley’s “Author’s Introduction”? How does the “Introduction” encourage us to read the novel as a cautionary tale? Refer to pertinent passages in Leslie S. Klinger’s “Foreword” to help you make your argument.
Discuss Google Alerts (in class)
View (in class): James Whale, dir., Frankenstein (1931)

M 10/1  Read: Finish Frankenstein, Volume I (35-120)
Discuss Google Alerts (in class)
Assign Essay 2 (topics to be generated in class, by class)

TH 10/11  Read: Frankenstein, Volume II and Anne K. Mellor, “Afterword: Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Genetic Engineering” (279-289)
Write: Essay 2 Due
Discuss Google Alerts (in class)
View (in class): James Whale, dir., Bride of Frankenstein (1935)
M 10/15  Read: *Frankenstein*, Volume III, Chapter I-Chapter V (193-245)
Discuss Google Alerts (in class)
Write: Essay 3 Due: Who would you rather be, if you had to choose—Victor Frankenstein or the creature, and why?

M 10/22  Read: FINISH *Frankenstein* (246-277)
Write: Essay 4 Due: Who is the monster in *Frankenstein*?
Discuss Google Alerts (in class)

M 10/29  Write: Essay 5 Due: What aspects of *Frankenstein* do you find most interesting, and why?
What questions do you have about the novel, and/or about the idea of Frankenstein? What general topic/idea do you want to pursue for your final research or creative project? What will that project be?
Discuss Google Alerts (in class)

M 11/5  Read: *Frankenstein*, Appendix 5, “*Frankenstein in Academia*” (329-336), and Appendix 6, “*Frankenstein in Popular Culture*” (337-342)
Assign and Begin Final Paper/Creative Project (Group work, in class)
Model presentations by Spring 2018 “Monsters” students

M 11/12  Veterans Day: Class Cancelled


M 11/26  Individual conferences/group workshop on final project

M 12/3  Individual conferences/group workshop on final project

M 12/10  Short presentations of final project. Class party.

Final projects due on Monday, December 17, at noon, in O’Leary 481