



Frankenstein: The History and Science Behind the Modern Prometheus

"Pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together . . . the hideous phantasm of a man."

Course Description:

This course is structured around the tale of Victor Frankenstein and his creation of a monster, both of which have fascinated the public since Mary Shelley first published her novel *Frankenstein* in 1818. Our aim in this course is to use the case of *Frankenstein* as a point of entry to consider the way humans have wrestled with the creation of life, from the Golem to alchemists' homunculus to genetic engineering. We will explore the ways man has used scientific inquiry throughout history in an attempt to master and mimic creation. In so doing, we will also consider the ethical questions that come into play in such an enterprise. The scientific and social and issues raised by Shelley's character are broad, and so too will be our source material, which includes the Greek mythology, the Old Testament, medieval alchemical recipes, literature, film, newspapers, and poetry. A significant part of the course will be dedicated to a close reading of Shelley's novel, situating it in the broader context of Romantic era Europe.

Texts:

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus* (Bedford/St. Martin's 2nd ed.)
Gaby Wood, *Edison's Eve* (Knopf, 2002)
Course Reader and selected online readings

Grades:

Writing Assignments	200 points
Participation	50 points
Midterm	100 points
Quizzes/Class activities	50 points
Final Exam	100 points
Total	500 points

Writing Assignments (due dates TBA):

Assignment #1: Article Exegesis (50 pts.)

600-800 word analysis of an academic article chosen from a list that will be posted on Blackboard. Exceptions must be approved by the professor. Turn in a hard-copy of the article you reviewed and your paper.

Assignment #2: Thematic paper (50 pts.)

You will respond to a prompt given by the professor (TBA) that is related to course themes.

Assignment #3: Research paper (100 pts total)

1200-1500 word essay on a topic assigned by the professor. You will have several prompts to choose from.

Participation note: in this class, participation implies more than attendance. Showing up and remaining silent will not earn you points. At the end of each week, I will give each student either 0, 3 or 5 points based on contributions to discussion and active participation, as evidenced by asking questions, seeking clarification, remaining alert and engaged, etc. You can see me at any time to determine where you stand in terms of participation points, though this grade won't be posted weekly on Blackboard.

Quizzes: You will be given a combination of unannounced quizzes and/or class activities, all based on the reading for a given day. Come to class prepared, having read all the assigned reading. If everyone is reading and discussions are robust, then we'll focus on interesting assignments that pertain to our historical documents. Quizzes will be reserved for instances where the professor thinks reading is not being done.

Midterm and Final Exam: These will both be a blend of key term identifications, multiple choice questions, short answer and short essay. The final is cumulative.

Course Schedule:

Part I: Organic Efforts

Week 1 Introduction

Introduction

Genesis excerpts (locate on your own, see reader for passage details); Ovid's "Pygmalion" (R); "The Far Side of Curiosity" in Roger Shattuck's *Forbidden Knowledge* (R); *Edison's Eve*, introduction

Week 2 Medieval Traditions: Kabbalah, the Golem, and Secrets

Excerpt from *The Golem of Prague*, pp. 29-41 and 329-344 (R)

William Newman, "The Homunculus and His Forebears: Wonders of Art and Nature" (R); Clara Pinto-Correia, "The H Word" (R)

Week 3 Secrets in Science

Paracelsus on artificial life (R); Borges poem "The Alchemist" (R), and Contextual Document on Paracelsus in Bedford copy of *Frankenstein* (pp. 201-204)

Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge*, pp. 165-169 (R); William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, chapter 2, "Knowledge and Power" (R)

***Article Exegesis due**

Part II: Mechanical Efforts

Week 4 Body and Machine part 1

Descriptions of notable books in the history of anatomy & physiology (R); Silvio Bedini, "The Role of Automata in the History of Technology." (R)

"Working Machines and Noble Mechanics: Guidobaldo del Monte and the Translation of Knowledge," by M. Henninger-Voss in *Isis* 91, no. 2 (2000): 233-259. (Available on **JSTOR**: download and print up)

Week 5 Body and Machine part 2

Descartes, *Treatise on Man* (R)

Edison's Eve, chapter 1, "The Blood of an Android" along with Jessica Riskin's, "The Defecating Duck, Or, the Ambiguous Origins of Artificial Life" in *Critical Inquiry* Summer 2003, vol. 20, no. 4, 599-633 (R)

Part III: Synthetic Efforts: Nature, Machines and the Prometheus**Week 6 Electricity, Enlightenment, and Frankenstein**

Essay #2 due: "The Education of Victor Frankenstein: Darwin and Davy," (R); Marcello Pera, "Galvani's Experiments and Theory," (read first two sections) (R); Humphry Davy, "A Discourse" in *Frankenstein*, pp. 211-221

Midterm Exam**Week 7 Frankenstein: the novel**

Shelly's *Frankenstein*, pp. 19-65

Frankenstein, pp. 65-106

Week 8 Frankenstein: the novel

Frankenstein, pp. 106-144.

Frankenstein, pp. 144-189

Week 9 Frankenstein Received and Analyzed

Contemporary reviews (R) and Contextual documents: Wollstonecraft, Rousseau, Goethe; read **one** of the essays on criticism (psychoanalytic, feminist, gender, etc.) *Edison's Eve*, chapter 3, "Journey to the Perfect Woman"

Week 10 Frankenstein in the Modern World

"Images of Technology in Popular Films: Discussion and Filmography," by Steven L. Goldman in *Science, Technology and Human Values* 14., no 3 (Summer 1989): 275-301.

Frankenstein in film

Course Policies

- ★ Arrive on time, as tardiness a distraction for everyone. If you are persistently late, you will be marked as absent and may face consequences per the terms of the absence policy.
- ★ Bring all readings with you to class for discussion purposes and be sure to print online readings.
- ★ No cell phones/pagers are permitted, even on vibrate. Store them in your bags during class.
- ★ All writing assignments are due on the specified date, printed clearly (no fading or multi-colored ink), and stapled. No assignments will be accepted late or via email or fax.
- ★ Any act of Academic Dishonesty, which includes plagiarism, will result in an automatic failure of the course and the placement of a letter regarding the infraction in your file with Student Affairs. See the University catalog for 2007-08 for details on the University policy.
- ★ If you are an M.A. student seeking credit for the graduate program, please see the professor regarding additional requirements for the course.
- ★ If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please let the professor know within the first week of class.