As Mary Shelley wrote in her 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, “I busied myself to think of a story—a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look around, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart. If I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name.” Shelley succeeded in her desire: the terrifying novel she wrote quickly became a world classic and has morphed into countless forms in both highbrow and popular culture, including the visual arts, fiction and non-fiction, stage plays, film, television, advertising, clothing, jewelry, toys, key chains, coffee mugs, games, Halloween costumes, comic books, jokes, cartoons, pornography, academic study, fan clubs, web sites, and even breakfast cereal. This seminar will examine the story of Frankenstein, his family, and his Creature as they appear in various literary and cinematic cultural forms from Mary Shelley’s day to our own, as well as their continuing cultural implications, including in science and medicine.
Class discussion, reports, and lectures will promote intensive examination and discussion of both the 1818 and 1831 versions of the novel, especially questions of gender. We will study its presence in literary and popular culture, beginning with stage and fictional productions from the 19th through 21st centuries, and film, television, and cyber-versions from the 20th century on. From the very first stage play the tendency has been to dumb down the Creature and elevate the moral status of Victor, and we must investigate this phenomenon. Herman Melville’s “The Bell Tower” (1855) is one of the first literary texts to be inspired by Shelley’s novel. Thomas Edison’s invention of the “Kinetogram” film system allowed him to make the first film of Frankenstein in 1910. The story has been the basis of films by directors such as James Whale, Terence Fisher, Ridley Scott, James Cameron, Ken Russell, Andy Warhol, Tim Burton, Mel Brooks, Kenneth Branagh, Bill Condon, and others with wildly divergent story lines. Frankenstein continues to be constantly mentioned in the media within contemporary cultural discussions of scientific breakthroughs, from test-tube babies to cloning to genetically engineered foods.

Frankenstein’s dramatic range of cultural subject-matter and depth of meaning are balanced by its essential elasticity; it has been called the first truly modern myth. As it has become increasingly commodified by modern consumer cultures, we will explore whether its original revolutionary spirit has become obscured, but also how its continuing transformations attest to its essential nature as a political and cultural critique.

The face of Boris Karloff as Frankenstein’s Creature, a literary figure created 200 years ago by an 18-year-old girl, is the most widely recognized literary character on the planet.

Why?

Required Texts:


Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Frankenstein (1831 edition) (Bedford Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism), ed. Johanna Smith, Bedford/St. Martin’s

Mellor, Anne. Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters, Routledge

Hoobler, Dorothy and Thomas, The Monsters: Mary Shelley and the Curse of Frankenstein, Back Bay Books

Haining, Peter. The Frankenstein Omnibus, Orion Books (out of print—instructor can supply copies of individual selections)

Required Texts, con’t.

Hitchcock, Susan Tyler, *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*, Norton

Stevenson, Robert Louis, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Oxford World’s Classics

Dick, Philip K., *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Del Ray

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *Never Let Me Go*, Vintage

**Recommended Texts:**


**Course Requirements:**

Research-based paper of 12 pages, midterm and final exams, oral report, film review, intense reading and class discussion.

**Grades:**

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**Syllabus:**

September 10 Introduction to Course: Syllabus, *Frankenstein* Reports and Reviews Assigned
Legend of the Frankenstein Monster (1994) video

September 17  Shelley, *Frankenstein*, volume I, pp. 3-58; “Composition and Revision,” 157-68; “Contexts,” 169-84 (all in Norton edition); Routledge *Sourcebook*, 1-36; Mellor chapters 1-2


October 8  Reading Day


October 22  Small, 205-208, Moers, 214-24, Gilbert and Gubar, 225-40, Poovey, 251-61, Winnett, 287-301 (Norton); Routledge *Sourcebook*, 96-104; Mellor chapters 4-6. Focus: Feminist and Gender Studies

Take-Home Midterm Exam Assigned


Midterm Exam Due

November 5  Routledge *Sourcebook*, 80-89; Film *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, con’t. Focus: Scientific and Medical Ethics

Prospectus/Annotated Bibliography Due

November 12  Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; Film *Young Frankenstein* (1974). Focus: Adaptations of *Frankenstein* from Naturalism to Shtick

November 19  Films: *Young Frankenstein*, con’t; Focus: Behind the Scenes: *Gods and Monsters* (1998)

November 26  *Gods and Monsters*; Routledge 89-104. Focus: Queering *Frankenstein*


Focus: *Frankenstein* as the Future Past

Review for Final Exam; Papers Due

**Final Exam: Monday, December 17, 1:30-4:00 p.m.**

Note: All work must be turned in on time. Late work will not be accepted without valid, written excuse. Please stay ahead on the reading—it includes a lot of cultural history as well as the literary/film selections.

**UTSA Statement on Academic Honesty:**

The University can best function and accomplish its objectives in an atmosphere of high ethical standards. All students are expected and encouraged to contribute to such an atmosphere in every way possible, especially by observing all accepted principles of academic honesty. It is recognized, however, that a large university will include a few students who do not understand, appreciate, or practice these principles. Consequently, alleged cases of academic dishonesty involving UTSA students will inevitably occur.

Academic or scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student, or the attempt to commit such acts. Academic dishonesty is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct and is addressed in Appendix B, Sec. 203 of 2012-13 Undergraduate Information Bulletin.