Frankenstein and Revisions
First-Year Writing Seminar, Fall 2015
Course Information

Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of the void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. (Mary Shelley, 1831 Preface to Frankenstein)

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein is not only one of the earliest and most famous works of science fiction, it’s also a story that has been retold many times over. This course focuses on Shelley’s novel and on novels and films that have reprised her story: James Whale’s films Frankenstein and The Bride of Frankenstein, H. G. Wells’s The Island of Doctor Moreau, Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner, and Alex Garland’s Ex Machina. How do later authors and filmmakers retell Shelley’s story? What appeals to them in her novel? What elements of Frankenstein do they retain, what do they alter, and why? Exploring these questions, we will examine how authors from Shelley onwards use the Frankenstein story to engage with contemporary scientific developments; our readings will include Darwin’s The Descent of Man; Alan Turing’s “Computing Machinery and Artificial Intelligence”; and Humphrey Davy’s “Discourse Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry,” which helped inform Shelley’s conception of science. Our thematic focus on revision parallels the writing practices we will develop in the course: just as a novel or film may creatively rewrite and respond to an earlier story or scientific idea, so is the academic paper a kind of creative rewriting of and response to another text; just as radical revision enables the novelist or filmmaker to create an original work, so does revising and rewriting one’s own drafts enable the student writer to make an original argument. The course’s assignments aim to help students develop a productive writing practice through short exercises as well as drafts and revisions of three formal papers.

Course Goals

• to master the fundamental elements of academic arguments, which advance arguable theses that are propelled by a genuine motive, supported by well-analyzed evidence, and developed through a progressive structure, and which may engage with arguments made by other scholars

• to develop a productive writing process, including pre-draft writing, drafting, and revision, as well as giving and receiving feedback

• to gain ease and skill with the exchange of ideas in seminar discussions

• to become conversant with the Frankenstein story and its retellings; to learn how different versions of the story intersect with one another and with their historical context.

Required Texts

1. Books: Available through the NYU Bookstore; you are welcome to obtain these texts another way, but it is essential that you have the 1818 text of Frankenstein. Please ask if you have a question about your editions.


These books are also on reserve at the library.

2. Course Packet. Available through NYU Classes.

3. There will also be some supplementary readings that I will either distribute in class or post to our Classes site.

3. Films: I've put copies on reserve at Bobst, but you may want to consider purchasing your own copy (via Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, etc.) as you'll need to have the films on hand when you write about them.

Please note that there are multiple versions of *Blade Runner*. Watch the one labeled "The Final Cut" (2007).


*Ex Machina*. DVD. Directed by Alex Garland, 2015. Lionsgate.

**Course Requirements**

- **Process Writing:**
  - Response Papers: there will be five or six reading responses due over the course of the semester. These should be 300 words (about one double-spaced page). For each response, I’ll give you a general prompt to reflect on. Bring a printed copy of your response to class on the day that it is due and be ready to hand it in at the end of class.
  - Cover Letters: for all of the drafts and revisions that you submit (six, in total), you’ll submit a cover letter of about 300 words in which you reflect on your essay and writing process. There will be specific instructions regarding cover letters with each assignment.
  - Draft Response Letters: for a certain number of the papers that we workshop, you’ll write a draft response letter of about 300 words in which you tell the author what works in their essay, what you find problematic, and how you think they should
revise. Again, more specific instructions will be included with each writing assignment.

- Participation: You should arrive punctually and be prepared for class, which means that you’ve completed the reading and any assignments, and brought with you all necessary materials. You should participate in seminar discussions and other activities, which includes contributing thoughtful comments and questions; engaging with other students as well as the professor; and listening attentively.

- Three formal essays:

Assignment 1: An analysis of a question raised by a passage in Shelley’s Frankenstein. 1200 words.

Due Dates:  Draft—6 p.m. on Friday, September 18  
Final Paper—6 p.m. on Friday, October 2

Assignment 2: An contextualizing argument about either James Whale’s Frankenstein or Bride of Frankenstein or H. G. Wells’s Island of Doctor Moreau. 1500 words.

Due Dates:  Draft—6 pm on Friday, October 23  
Final Paper—6 p.m. on Friday, November 6

Assignment 3: An argument about Blade Runner or Ex Machina that engages with an argument by another scholar. 2000 words.

Due Dates:  Draft—6 p.m. on Friday, December 4  
Final Paper—6 p.m. on Thursday, December 17

Grading

15% Paper 1
20% Paper 2
30% Paper 3
20% Process Writing
15% Class Participation

Policies

- Written Work: Deadlines are important in this class; individual extensions will be granted only in the case of illness, family emergencies, or religious observance. Late revisions will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each day that they are late. Late drafts may not receive written feedback. Late process writing may not be accepted.

All formal papers must be completed in order for you to pass the course, and they must be submitted within the time frame of the assignment.

- Attendance: You may miss up to two classes without penalty; more than two absences for reasons other than illness, family emergency, or religious observance will affect your grade; habitual lateness will also affect your grade.

- Academic Integrity: As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to
uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html); we will discuss academic integrity, including responsible source use and collaboration, in class this semester.

- Technology: In order to make it easier for everyone to focus on the collaborative and cooperative work of the seminar, you may not use a laptop, tablet, smartphone, iWatch or Google Glass in class for any purpose, unless otherwise instructed. This means that you must purchase hard copies of all books and print out any assignments or papers (your own or your classmates') needed for class on any given day. Please turn off or silence your mobile phone.

You are welcome to email me with any questions that arise over the course of the semester; I read email regularly during weekdays, less frequently at night or on weekends.
Paper 1: Make an argument about a moment in *Frankenstein* that you find especially strange, surprising, unexpected, or puzzling. Your paper should begin by asking a genuine question about a passage or brief scene; and it should develop an answer to that question.

Your finished essay should be 1200 words (about four pages, double-spaced), not including the cover letter. The draft is due on Friday, September 18, at 6 pm. The final paper is due on Friday, October 2, at 6 pm.

**Goals for this assignment:**

- ask a genuine question that serves as a motive for your essay
- develop an answer to that question
- smoothly incorporate well-chosen quotations from the novel
- closely analyze quotations

**Grading Standards:**

a paper in the A-range successfully achieves the goals of the assignment: it asks a real question about the novel; presents an answer to that question; supports its explanation through careful, insightful work with evidence and analysis; is written in a clear style; contains very few errors of spelling, grammar, or punctuation.

a paper in the B-range resembles an A-range paper in some ways, but may be less focused; may establish a functional but unsubstantial motive; may lack evidence in places, or present evidence that is under-analyzed; may contain problems of style or errors of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

a paper in the C-range resembles a B-range paper in some ways, but may be unfocused; may lack a motive or present a motive that is simplistic or perfunctory; may include very little quoted evidence; may present summary rather than analysis or may misinterpret evidence; may contain errors of expression, spelling, or mechanics that distract from or obscure the meaning.

a paper in the D-range may show signs of beginning to engage with the issues, topics, and sources of the assignment, but lack focus or significant engagement with the sources; D-range papers usually fall short of the page requirement.

Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference.

**Essay #1 Draft Cover Letter:** Each time you hand in a draft or a revision, you’ll hand in a cover letter along with it. For the draft of Essay #1, please write a letter, addressed to your readers—that is, to the class at large—in which you answer the following questions and present any other concerns that you have. Think of the letter as an opportunity to ask for the kind of feedback you think you particularly need. Your cover letter should be about 300 words; please note that it is not included in the word count for the assignment.
— What do you see as your motive? (Resist the temptation to quote your essay and instead paraphrase.)
— What do you see as your main idea or point? (Here, too, rephrase rather than quote.)
— What do you see as the most interesting part of your paper?
— What are the biggest problems you’re having? What do you want your reader to help you with? Rather than asking about style, wording, mechanics, your conclusion, etcetera, go for the big stuff: motive, use of evidence, effectiveness of analysis.

**Essay #1 Draft Response:** For each of the draft workshops, I’ll ask you to write a certain number of letters. Please take some time to compose these letters and try to make comments that you think will help the writer revise. When you come to class on our workshop days, please bring two printed copy of the letter(s) you’ve been assigned—one is for the writer, one is for me.

Avoid trivial commentary (including focusing your letter on matters of style) and think in larger terms about what this writing really needs. No draft submitted in this course will be in such good shape that it requires just tinkering with tone or vocabulary or grammar. Be a rigorous, incisive editor; offer helpful, reflective commentary—but do so in a tone that is kind and constructive, never harsh or aggressive.

**Directions:**

Read each essay critically, keeping in mind the key qualities of good writing that we’ve been discussing and that are stressed by the questions below. Then write a letter of 300 words to the author in which you address these questions:

— In your own words, what is this paper about? What is its idea? Bear in mind that as writers, we often don’t recognize the most promising idea in our own drafts! See what you find if you doubt the writer’s stated intentions and look for the real insight elsewhere.
— What are this draft’s strengths?
— What is the writer’s most interesting point?
— Remembering that motive, evidence, and analysis are the priorities for this assignment, give the writer advice about what to focus on in revising.

**Essay #1 Revision Cover Letter:** Each time you hand in a revision (three times) you’ll hand in a cover letter along with it. In your letter, addressed to me, please answer the following questions and discuss any other concerns you have:

— Reflect on how your motivating question and answer to that question have changed between draft and revision.
— What are you happiest with in this revision?
— What was most challenging in your drafting and revision process? How did you approach those challenges?
— What are you most dissatisfied with in this paper? What would you continue to work on if you had the chance to revise again?
— What do you see as the strongest part of your paper?

**Assignment I Schedule**

**Week One**
Thursday, September 3
Introductions

Week Two

Tuesday, September 8
reading assignment: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. 1
writing assignment: Response Paper 1.1: From the first volume of *Frankenstein*, choose three scenes or passages about which you want to ask questions—scenes or passages that you find startling or puzzling. These could be passages that don’t fit your preconceptions of the novel (especially if this is your first time reading it), or they could be passages that you find weird or confusing within the context of the book itself. You don’t need to transcribe the passages in full on your reading response, but please note where they appear so that I can find them. For each passage, write a few sentences that articulate a question or problem that these passages raise. (300 words)
in-class: discussion of *Frankenstein* and reading responses

Thursday, September 10
reading assignment: *Frankenstein*, vol. 2 + Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*
writing assignment: nothing to hand in, but look for connections between *Frankenstein* and Rousseau’s *Discourse*; in particular, consider whether the Creature represents Rousseau’s Natural Man
in class: discussion of Rousseau’s *Natural Man*, motives

Week Three

Tuesday, September 15
reading assignment: *Frankenstein*, vol. 3 + Humphrey Davy, “Discourse Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry”
writing assignment: again, nothing to hand in, but think about connections between Shelley’s novel and Davy’s lecture
in class: discussion of *Frankenstein*; developing questions for the paper

Thursday, September 17
reading assignment: Anne Mellor, “Choosing a Text of *Frankenstein* to Teach”
writing assignment: write one body paragraph for your paper in which you discuss some evidence from the text of *Frankenstein*’s revisions; evidence and analysis

Friday, September 18
Due at 6 pm: Draft of Paper 1

Week Four

draft conferences Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday

Tuesday, September 22
reading assignment: two drafts (TBA)
writing assignment: draft response letters for each writer + bring printed copies of both workshop papers to class + bring a printed copy of your own draft to class
in class: draft workshops

Thursday, September 24
reading assignment: two drafts (TBA)
writing assignment: draft response letters for each writer + bring printed copies of both workshop papers to class + bring a printed copy of your draft to class
in class: draft workshops

Week Five

Tuesday, September 29
reading assignment: none
writing assignment: work on revising your paper: it's important that you make some substantial changes before today's class
in class: revision strategies for Paper 1

Looking ahead:
Friday, October 2
Due at 6 pm: Paper 1 (Final)
Paper 2: Make an argument about one of James Whale’s Frankenstein films (Frankenstein or The Bride of Frankenstein) or H. G. Wells’s Island of Doctor Moreau and one of the contextualizing sources that we’ve read together (Stoddard, Davenport, or Darwin).

Your finished essay should be 1500 words, not including the cover letter. The draft is due on Friday, October 23, at 6 pm. The final paper is due on Friday, November 6, at 6 pm.

Goals of this assignment:

In writing this essay, you’ll continue to work on the goals of the first paper: developing a strong motive, incorporating specific evidence, and presenting thoughtful analysis. In addition to honing these skills, you’ll also work on:

— putting two sources into conversation with each other
— analyzing film
— formulating a strongly arguable thesis

Grading Standards:

a paper in the A-range successfully achieves the goals of the assignment: it establishes a focused topic; advances an interesting, arguable thesis; presents a compelling motive that shows why the thesis is original or worthwhile; employs a logical and progressive structure; analyzes evidence insightfully and in depth; puts its sources in conversation with each other in an effective manner; employs a clear style, and contains very few mechanical errors.

a paper in the B-range paper resembles an A-range paper in some ways, but may present a thesis that is vague or insufficiently arguable; establish a functional but unsubstantial motive; employ a generally logical but somewhat disorganized, underdeveloped, or static structure; include well-chosen but sometimes unanalyzed and undigested evidence; show difficulty putting its sources in relation; display some problems of style or mechanics.

a paper in the C-range resembles a B-range paper in some ways, but may also feature a confusing or descriptive thesis; provide a simplistic motive or none at all; lack a coherent structure or rely on an overly rigid structure like the five-paragraph essay; fail to present enough evidence, or present evidence that is insufficiently analyzed; drop in sources without properly contextualizing or citing them; contain errors of expression, spelling, or mechanics that distract from or obscure the meaning.

a paper in the D-range may show signs of beginning to engage with the issues, topics, and sources of the assignment, but lack focus or significant engagement with the sources; D-range papers usually fall short of the page requirement.

Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference.
Draft Cover Letter: Please write a letter addressed to your readers in which you answer the following questions and present any other concerns that you have; remember, your letter is an opportunity to ask for the kind of feedback you think you need. Your letter should be about 300 words.

- What do you see as the motive of this paper?
- What is your thesis? (Rephrase rather than quoting yourself.)
- What are the biggest problems you're having at this point in the writing process?
- When you revise, what is the one big thing about your essay (motive, thesis, structure, and so on) that you want to change? Tell your reader why you are discontented with this aspect of your paper so that they can advise you on how to rework it.

Essay #2 Draft Responses: As with your previous draft response, please think big; what overarching changes does this writing need? Make your marginalia and write a letter (about 300 words) to the writer in which you address these questions:

- What is this essay's thesis? What is its motive? State these in your own words, paraphrasing the writer—and if the thesis or motive are unclear or absent, be forthright about that.
- Is the thesis arguable?
- What is the writer's single most interesting point?
- In the cover letter, the writer has asked one or more questions. What answers do you have to offer?

Essay #2 Revision Cover Letter: Write a letter, addressed to me, in which you discuss your revision. Be sure to reflect on the elements of writing we've focused on: motive, thesis, analysis.

Assignment 2 Schedule

Thursday, October 1
reading assignment: watch James Whale's Frankenstein (film)
writing assignment: after watching the film, come up with one significant way that it adheres to Shelley's novel, and one significant way in which it departs in class: discussion of Frankenstein; analyzing film

Friday, October 2
Due at 6 pm: Paper 1 (Final)

Week Six

Tuesday, October 6
reading assignment: watch James Whale's Bride of Frankenstein (film)
writing assignment: Bride of Frankenstein (like Whale's film Frankenstein) seems, on the surface, like campy horror. After you've watched it, brainstorm some arguments that go against the obvious to argue that there's more to it than that in class: discussion of Bride of Frankenstein; the arguable thesis

Thursday, October 8
reading assignment: Charles Davenport, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* and Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt Against Civilization*
writing assignment: Response Paper 2.1: How do Whale's Frankenstein films engage with the contemporaneous eugenics movement? (300 words)
in class: discussion of Stoddard and Davenport

*Week Seven*

Tuesday, October 13 • no class (classes meet on a Monday schedule)

Thursday, October 15
reading assignment: H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, to p. 79; Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*
writing assignment: as you do the reading, reflect on what you think Wells's novel is saying about Darwin's theory of evolution
in class: discussion of Moreau and Origin

*Week Eight*

Tuesday, October 20
reading assignment: *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, complete; Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*
writing assignment: Response 2.2: How does *The Island of Doctor Moreau* engage with the theory of evolution presented by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*? Does Wells's novel accept, resist, question, or build on Darwin's scientific ideas? (300 words)
in class: discussion of Moreau and Descent; work with responses

Thursday, October 22
reading assignment: none
writing assignment: write a couple of pages of your draft and bring them to class with you
in class: work with drafts

Friday, October 23
Due at 6 pm: Draft of Paper 2

*Week Nine*

draft conferences Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday

Tuesday, October 27
reading assignment: two drafts (TBA)
writing assignment: two draft response letters + bring your draft to class
in class: draft workshops

Thursday, October 29
reading assignment: three drafts (TBA)
writing assignment: draft response letters (to be assigned) + bring your draft to class
in class: draft workshops

*Week Ten*
Tuesday, November 3
  reading assignment: none
  writing assignment: at least one major revision to your second paper
  in class: revising paper two

Looking ahead
Friday, November 6
  Due at 6 p.m.: Paper 2
Paper 3: Make an argument about either *Blade Runner* or *Ex Machina* that either engages with Lisa Zunshine’s argument about the Frankenstein Complex or that challenges, refines, or builds on the argument of another scholar who has written about your chosen primary source. Your paper should incorporate one source that you find on your own.

Your finished paper should be 2000 words (six to seven pages), not including the cover letter. A rough draft is due in class on Thursday, December 3. The draft is due on Friday, December 4, at 6 pm. The final paper is due on Thursday, December 17, at 6 pm.

**Goals of this Assignment:**

In writing this paper, you'll continue to develop the skills that were our focus in Assignments 1 and 2. In addition, you'll work on:

— engaging with a theory by a published scholar
— opening with a strong introduction
— incorporating a source that you locate through your independent research
— using orienting so that a reader not familiar with your sources would be able to understand your argument
— finding a structure that allows your arguments to develop

**A note on sources:**

You are required both to challenge/refine the argument of a secondary source, and to locate one source on your own. You may choose the excerpts of Lisa Zunshine’s book as your secondary source; if you do so, you must find another source, of any type, on your own. Alternatively, you may choose to independently locate a secondary source whose argument you will challenge (in which case you don’t need another outside source).

**Grading Standards:**

a paper in the A-range successfully achieves the goals of the assignment: it establishes a focused topic; advances an interesting, arguable thesis; presents a compelling motive and genuine engagement with another scholar or scholars; employs a logical and progressive structure; analyzes evidence insightfully and in depth; draws from well-chosen sources; employs a clear style, and contains no mechanical errors.

a paper in the B-range resembles an A-range paper in some ways, but may present a thesis that is vague or insufficiently arguable; establish a functional but unsubstantial motive; engage with its secondary source in a static, perfunctory, or otherwise problematic way; employ a generally logical but somewhat disorganized, underdeveloped, or formulaic structure; include well-chosen but sometimes unanalyzed and undigested evidence; display some problems of style or mechanics.

a paper in the C-range resembles a B-range paper in some ways, but may also feature a confusing or descriptive thesis; provide a simplistic motive or none at
all; engage with its secondary source very briefly; lack a coherent structure or rely on an overly rigid structure like the five-paragraph essay; fail to present enough evidence, or present evidence that is insufficiently analyzed; contain errors of expression, spelling, or mechanics that distract from or obscure the meaning.

a paper in the D-range may show signs of beginning to engage with the issues, topics, and sources of the assignment, but lacks focus or significant engagement with the sources; D-range papers usually fall short of the page requirement.

Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference.

**Draft Cover Letter:** Write a letter, addressed to your readers, in which you discuss what you think works well in your draft, describe what you consider the problems you’re facing at this stage of the process, and ask your readers the questions you have about the paper. Be sure to address your motive and thesis, and to focus on other key elements of good writing (structure, evidence, analysis, key terms).

**Draft Response Letter:** As you read the draft assigned to you, make your marginal notes, and then write a letter in which you respond to the author’s concerns, discuss what you yourself see as the essay’s strengths and weaknesses (which may not coincide with the author’s opinions), and propose suggestions for revision.

**Revision Cover Letter:** Write a letter, addressed to me, in which you discuss your revision. Be sure to reflect on your thesis and motive.

**Assignment 3 Schedule**

**Thursday, November 5**

- reading assignment: Lisa Zunshine, *Strange Concepts* pp. 1–19; 51–89
- writing assignment: As you read the excerpt from Zunshine’s book, think about it as you would a draft by one of your classmates. Note a couple of strengths as well as a couple of claims that you would like to question or challenge.
- in class: discussion of Zunshine

**Friday, November 6**

Due at 6 pm: Paper 2

**Week Eleven**

**Tuesday, November 10**

- reading assignment: watch Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (film)
- writing assignment: as you watch the film, reflect on how it engages with *Frankenstein* (novel and films)
- in class: discussion of *Blade Runner*

**Thursday, November 12**

Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” + RadioLab podcast

writing assignment: Response 3.2: Discuss two specific ways *Blade Runner* responds to twentieth-century developments in the technology of artificial
intelligence that you've learned about from Turing and the RadioLab podcast. (300 words) in class: wrap up discussion of Blade Runner; artificial intelligence

Week Twelve

Tuesday, November 17
reading assignment: Ex Machina
writing assignment: reflect on the connections of Ex Machina to Frankenstein
in class: discussion of Ex Machina

Thursday, November 19
reading assignment: from Kurzweil, The Singularity is Near; Masahiro Mori, “The Uncanny Valley”
writing assignment: Response 3.2: think about Ex Machina engages with the history of artificial intelligence that you’ve been learning about (in the readings for today as well as in the contextual materials with Blade Runner).
in class: discussion of Ex Machina

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, November 24
reading assignment: Sample Student Paper
writing assignment: Consider the sample paper’s strengths and weaknesses, paying special attention to how the writer engages with secondary sources
in class: discussion of sample paper; engaging with secondary sources; “They Say, I Say”

Thursday, November 26 • Thanksgiving Break; no class

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, December 1
reading assignment: none
writing assignment: think about what kind of outside source you want to find
in class: library visit

Thursday, December 3
reading assignment: none
writing assignment: rough draft of Paper 3
in class: work on drafts

Friday, December 4
Due at 6 pm: Draft of Paper 3

Week Fifteen

draft conferences Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

Tuesday, December 8
reading assignment: three drafts
writing assignment: draft response letters + bring your draft to class
in class: draft workshops
Thursday, December 10
  reading assignment: three drafts
  writing assignment: draft response letters + bring your draft to class
  in class: draft workshops

Week Sixteen

Tuesday, December 15
  reading assignment: none
  writing assignment: keep revising + bring your draft to class
  in class: course conclusions

Thursday, December 17
  Due at 6 pm: Assignment 3