

Mini-course on Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay  
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee  
From darkness to promote me?

*Paradise Lost*, 10.743-5

MDC-Brooklyn, April 2019

**Instructor:** Julie Crawford (Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University)

**Teaching Assistants:** Nivita Arora and Diana Horobets

**Class Time:** 12-3, Friday April 12, Friday April 19, Friday April 26 and Friday May 3.

### **Course Description**

Written by the teenage child of political radicals during a holiday spent in the company of the most famous poets of the age, *Frankenstein* was a sensation from the moment it first appeared in print. Equal parts thriller, ghost story, and science fiction, the novel is also an enduring tale of exploration, adventure, and obsession. To this day, Victor Frankenstein's creature remains one of the most famous characters in popular culture. But the novel is also a philosophical inquiry into the roles of science and art in society, the nature (and limits) of human freedom and inquiry, humanity's place in the natural world, and the origins, meaning, and value of life itself.

### **Goals of the Course**

- Thinking more deeply about scientific inquiry, the human impact on the natural world, and the meaning and value of human life.
- Improving skills in reading and discussion.
- Developing resources for personal reflection and further conversation and reading.

### **Work for the Course**

Your main task each week is to read and think about the assigned portion of the novel. You are invited to bring a one-page reflection on the assigned readings to class. In your reflection you can discuss some of these questions, as well as the specific ones below:

What was the most surprising, moving, or unsettling part of the reading?

What was your favorite part of the reading?

What part made you think the hardest? What ideas did you find most interesting?

### **Schedule**

**Class 1: Volume I, Preface, Letters, and Chapters I-IV.** Why do you think the novel begins with a series of letters? Does it matter who writes them, to whom they are written, or from where they are written? When we get to "Chapter 1," where a novel usually starts, what exactly are we reading? Is Volume I a treatise about education?

**Class 2. Volume I, Chapters V-VI.** Why do you think Volume I ends with a crime story and a trial? What perspectives do the final chapters include that the first four do not?

**Class 3: Volume II (and excerpts from *Genesis* and *Paradise Lost*).** Why do you think the creature comes to tell Victor his tale in the shadow of the Alps? What, to you, are the most important lessons the monster learns about human beings? What do language and reading offer him that physical things, like food and a place to sleep, do not? Why do you think Shelley makes the creature's request so compelling?

**Class 4: Volume III** takes Victor and Clerval to England. Why, and why now? Why does he end up in the "remotest Orkneys"? Victor travels many places and takes many forms of transportation. What is the significance of his final form of transportation?