

INDE 212: Medical Humanities and the Arts
Stanford University School of Medicine
 Spring quarter 2017 Instructor: Audrey Shafer, MD

Assignment: read *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, bring to class an article, an item, a web resource or any other material (be creative!) related to Frankenstein and/or its current impact (e.g., artificial intelligence, tissue engineering, reproductive ethics). Alternatively, choose a couple of paragraphs from the novel itself – be prepared to read aloud in class and discuss why you chose that section

Responses:

Excerpts from *Frankenstein*:

(page numbers refer to paperback Dover Thrift Edition 1994)

p. 4:

But I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection. I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me; whose eyes would reply to mine. You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother! I am too ardent in execution, and too impatient of difficulties. But it is a still greater evil to me that I am self-educated: for the first fourteen years of my life I ran wild on a common, and read nothing but our uncle Thomas's books of voyages. At that age I became acquainted with the celebrated poets of our own country; but it was only when it had ceased to be in my power to derive its most important benefits from such a conviction that I perceived the necessity of becoming acquainted with more languages than that of my native country. Now I am twenty-eight, and am in reality more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen. It is true that I have thought more, and that my day dreams are more extended and magnificent; but they want (as the painters call it) keeping; and I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind.

p. 33:

The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time. I knew my silence disquieted them; and I well remembered the words of my father: "I know that while you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected."

I knew well, therefore, what would be my father's feelings; but I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination. I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed.

I then thought that my father would be unjust if he ascribed my neglect to vice, or faultiness on my part; but I am now convinced that he was justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from blame. A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity. I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule.

p. 69:

"How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? they spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I had, for they are kinder to me than your fellow-beings. If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great that not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of its rage. Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands."

"Why do you call to my remembrance," I rejoined, "circumstances, of which I shudder to reflect, that I have been the miserable origin and author? Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you! You have made me wretched beyond expression. You have left me no power to consider whether I am just to you or not. Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form."

Media and clips:

Anime *Full Metal Alchemist* 2003 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNXY2Fx2Pq4>

Frankenstein silent film by Edison Studios 1910 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-fM9meqfQ4>

Black Mirror episode “White Christmas” 2014 with egg shaped device AI
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Christmas_\(Black_Mirror\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Christmas_(Black_Mirror))

Visual Images:

White Strawberries



Bolt tattoos over cadaveric ligament knee surgery (©)



Painting: Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog, by Caspar David Friedrich c. 1818 (image on front of paperback)



Book excerpt:

Skloot R. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. NY: Random House, 2010 p 196 “The more Deborah struggled to understand her mother’s cells, the more HeLa research terrified her....”

Articles:

Lehman-Wilzig SN. Frankenstein Unbound: Towards a legal definition of Artificial Intelligence. *Futures* 13(6):442-457, 1991
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0016328781901002>

Jabr F. Are we too close to making Gattaca a reality? *Scientific American* Oct 28, 2013 <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/brainwaves/are-we-too-close-to-making-gattaca-a-reality/>

Specter M. Could genetically modified mosquitoes save Hawaii’s endangered birds? *New Yorker* Sept 9, 2016 <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/could-genetically-modified-mosquitoes-save-hawaiis-endangered-birds>

Mori G. Head transplants and personal identity: A philosophical and literary survey. *CNS Neuroscience & Therapeutics* 22:275-9, 2016
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cns.12534/pdf>

Hesman T. New era of human embryo gene editing begins. *ScienceNews* 190(9):15, Oct 29, 2016
<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/new-era-human-embryo-gene-editing-begins?mode=magazine&context=192457&tgt=nr>

Cuoco JA, Davy JR. Operation Frankenstein: Ethical reflections of human head transplantation. *Insights in Neurosurgery* 1(2):9, 2016. <http://neurosurgery.imedpub.com/operation-frankenstein-ethical-reflections-ofhuman-head-transplantation.php?aid=9421>

Gordon C. Dr. Frankenstein's three big mistakes: What artificial intelligence researchers can learn from Frankenstein. *Slate* Jan 23, 2017
http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2017/01/what_artificial_intelligence_researchers_can_learn_from_frankenstein.html (part of Futurography: Frankenstein
http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/futurography_frankenstein.html)