

Frankenstein: Modern Science and Its Literary Lives  
Dr. Anastasia Klimchynskaya



4 sessions on Zoom: Mondays Jun 21, Jul 12, Jul 26, Aug 9 | 6:30–8:30 p.m.

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*Frankenstein* has been hailed as the first work of science fiction, but what does this mean, exactly? And what does it mean for a cultural work to engage with scientific practice? Published in 1818, *Frankenstein* came to life at the dawn of a century already undergoing a series of transformations that would solidify modern science as we understand it while simultaneously raising questions about its place within society: the Industrial Revolution, which reshaped individual and collective life through the proliferation of technologies on an unprecedented scale, the simultaneous popularization and professionalization of science, and the first investigations into electricity, whose numerous applications would reframe understandings of the possible and the magical throughout the century. This class, then, will go beyond a consideration of how *Frankenstein* incorporates specific, contemporary scientific practices (such as, for

example, galvanism) to investigate how it draws on the resources of literature (particularly its predecessors in Gothic and horror fiction, mythology, and philosophical texts) to interrogate the paradigms and assumptions at the foundation of modern science, the wider existential and ontological questions at stake in its practices, and the role and responsibility of the scientist within a society – all of which remain central to the genre of science fiction. We will also read texts by Edgar Allan Poe, Alexandre Dumas, Ann Radcliffe, Christopher Marlowe, and Francis Bacon to better understand *Frankenstein* as part of a lineage of literary and philosophical works that engage with scientific and knowledge-making practices.

June 21: The “Triumph of Human Empire” in the Industrial Age

Read:

Preface, Letters, ch. 1-2

Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* (excerpts)

July 12: What Makes *Frankenstein* Science Fiction?

Read:

Vol I, ch. 3-7; vol. II, ch. 1;

1831 preface

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (scenes 1-3&5)

Ann Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry”

July 26: Galvanism and the Boundaries of life and Death

Read:

Vol II, ch. 2-9;

Alexandre Dumas, *1001 Fantomes* (introductory chapters, “Albert and Solange”)

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”

August 9: Science and Community

Read:

Vol. III, ch. 1-7

About the Instructor

**Dr. Anastasia Klimchynskaya** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge at the University of Chicago and was a cohost for the The Rosenbach’s Sundays with *Frankenstein*. Her current book project focuses on the emergence of science fiction in the nineteenth century, arguing that *Frankenstein* and the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, Albert Robida, and H.G. Wells represent the formal expression of a new set of paradigms through which humanity saw the world following the Industrial Revolution. She has presented widely on science fiction (including *Frankenstein*) and the history of science at the Science History Institute in Philadelphia, the Cyberpunk Culture Conference, the City Tech Science Fiction Symposium, Science in Public, and the Philadelphia Science Fiction Conference (Philcon), of which she is also the deputy programming head.