Luke Coulter

Doctor Mary Warner

English 112B

11/27/2016

<div align="center">The Hubris of Gods and Teachers</div>

Rationale:

Mary Shelley's <u>Frankenstein</u> has an "imaginative plot" that includes time shifts and differing perspectives (LfTYA 9). It has characters that reflect typical teen experiences and then the novel goes beyond those experiences to create something new. It contains themes that relate to "immediate interests and global concerns," and these themes provide opportunities for "emotional and intellectual growth" (LfTYA 9). It could be an ideal young adult novel, if it weren't for the fact that it spectacularly fails the three remaining Exeter qualities. Its tension does not come from "narrative hooks and a fast pace" (LfTYA 9). Its "imaginative language" is both complex and lexically dense (LfTYA 9). Finally, its level of sophistication is so high that it often reads more like something out of an academic journal than a novel. <u>Frankenstein</u> is a phenomenal work, but its complexity makes it absolutely impenetrable without either context or skillful guidance.

This is unfortunate, because romance novels appear on the SATs and ACTs with alarming frequency. Furthermore, almost all lower division college writing courses will require some familiarity with romance as a genre. <u>Frankenstein</u> is academically rigorous, and aspects of it will not only appear on every English syllabus that students will come across from their sophomore year of high school until they graduate, but will also appear in every science fiction

movie they watch, every dystopian, post-apocalyptic novel they read, and every near-future video game that they play. The influence of <u>Frankenstein</u> cannot be overstated, and a thorough understanding of it can provide an insight into both literature and life.

Even if all of that wasn't enough, romance novels (and gothic novels in particular) deal with themes like depression, sexual awakening, ennui, mental illness, social criticism, and overpowering emotions. These are all things that young adults have to struggle with. Romance novels can act as a resource for students who need ways to deal with these problems. <u>Frankenstein</u> is iconic because it deals specifically with the struggle between a creator and his creation in a clear allegory to parenting. It is a perversion of a coming-of-age story, told from the point of view of an inept, narcissistic parent -- a point of view that some students desperately need. Unfortunately, writing about terrible parents is fairly taboo to this day. <u>Frankenstein</u> can help young adults understand another dimension to their parents at a time in their lives when they need an understanding of that dimension, if they can engage with text.

This is a very big "if." Though <u>Frankenstein</u>'s themes are universal and fascinating, the text itself is fairly archaic and needlessly complex. Given that one of the things the novel is criticizing is an inflexible and amoral academia, the use of high level language to describe even the most mundane things is a tool that Mary Shelley uses to lampoon the academic establishment. Unfortunately, this makes the novel awkward for young adults because the reading level is just too high. While it is certainly possible to assign it regardless of its level because students should be challenged, there is a better way.

Rather than attempting to take the novel as a whole and requiring students to slog through it, excerpts can be taken from the most interesting and relevant parts. These excerpts can be used

to hone textual analysis, critical thinking, and comparison skills. Assignments can be designed around the novel's themes and ideas without putting students to sleep.

Unit Introduction:

John Green is a contemporary author of young adult novels. Many of his books have won awards, and all of them are popular with teachers. In his spare time, he runs a youtube channel that produces a series called "Crash Course Literature." One of the videos in this series is called "Don't Reanimate Corpses! Frankenstein Part 1: Crash Course Literature 205" and is about Frankenstein. The video gives a fantastic introduction to some of the themes of the novel, some of the context about when and why it was written, and some of the effects it had on literature in general. He does make a few small errors, but, rather than devaluing the video, these issues can generate an in-class discussion. For example, what is the difference between trying to find a "northwest passage" and attempting to reach the north pole? Why might this difference be important? After a short lecture (including a question and answer session) that fills in some of the gaps not addressed by John Green's video, the class can take a few minutes to read the very first epistle of the novel together out loud. Finally, there will be either an in-class essay or a homework assignment where the students have to answer two of these four prompts with a single paragraph each:

1: How is trying to find a northwest passage similar to trying to reanimate a corpse?

2: Briefly describe how Mary Shelley's life might have influenced Frankenstein.

3: Is Frankenstein a horror novel, a science fiction novel, or a romantic novel? Is it a combination? Explain.

4: What are some modern day examples of Frankenstein's monster? (For example, HAL from 2001: A Space Odyssey, self-driving cars, etc.)

Hopefully, the students can use these prompts to later come up with some background or a thesis for an essay.

Unit General:

Frankenstein won't be assigned as a whole. Instead, small excerpts of it will be assigned on a piece by piece basis, and paired with short stories, songs, comics, and possibly a movie. For example, when Dr. Frankenstein has a suspicion that his creation is murdering his friends and family but isn't certain of it yet, the manner of writing and tension is very similar to Edgar Allen Poe's "The Tell Tale Heart." Isaac Asimov's short story "Little Lost Robot" contains a scene very reminiscent of when Dr. Frankenstein and his monster are arguing about the monster's place in the world. Kid Cudi's song "Pursuit of Happiness" could have been written and sung by Dr. Frankenstein himself during his early days at the university.

But Frankenstein isn't the only thing that will be studied during this unit. It can serve as an introduction into romance and gothic literature in general. Mary Shelley's life was filled with towering figures in the field of literature. A brief study of her and her friends can show students that these figures were human, and that their failures and foibles are part of what makes up the fabric of literature today. Mary Shelley herself was only nineteen when she wrote the novel, and knowing that this novel was written by somebody who had just gone through the same rollercoaster of young adulthood that the students are experiencing can make them engage with the work on a whole other level.

Furthermore, <u>Frankenstein</u> is often viewed as the very first science fiction novel. Science fiction is extremely popular with young adults -- in particular dystopian, post-apocalyptic hero's journey stories. Drawing a line from the roots of science fiction to contemporary series like <u>The Hunger Games</u> by Suzanne Collins or <u>City of Ember</u> by Jeanne DuPrau can be a fascinating study, if any students choose to undertake it.

Assignments:

There will be four major assignments during the unit -- An in-class essay, a take-home essay, a work of creative writing (or other media), and a group project and presentation.

The in-class essay will be on a single prompt. It will be similar to a quiz, and its purpose is to prepare students for timed writing that happens on the SATs and in college. The students should be able to form an opinion on the question in the prompt and develop it into a thesis. Students will have the opportunity to pick between two different options. The first will be on what the role of science is in the narrative. The second will be on the reasons that Mary Shelley might have written it as an epistolary novel. Students can choose to answer either one. This means that if a student was more interested in the context around the novel, they have the option to pursue and develop that interest. If they were more interested in the novel itself, they have the option to chase that down instead.

The take-home essay will be more open. It will be a comparative essay between one of the resources that we've discussed in class (see annotated bibliography) and one of the passages that they have read so far in <u>Frankenstein</u>. Comparative essays are excellent tools to get students to understand the themes presented in the text in a broader sense.

The creative writing will be something that students can do to expand their minds. It's a chance to stretch and an opportunity to explore things that they might not get a chance to explore otherwise, like architecture or painting on velvet. The only constriction about this assignment is that it has to relate to <u>Frankenstein</u> in some way, and the student has to be able to justify that succinctly with a short sentence or two about it.

The group project will give students a chance to get together with their peers to talk about the novel and the other works that they will be studying. Their presentations will conclude the unit, and each presentation will be about some aspect of the unit. One presentation will be about romance and gothic novels, one will be about science fiction, one will be about Mary Shelley herself, and others will depend on what resources resonated with the students the most.

Finally, throughout the unit, there will be a standard daily reading journal. Students will pull a quote from one of the things they have studied and do a small analysis on it. Optionally, they have the opportunity to bring in a reference to <u>Frankenstein</u> from popular culture. Perhaps it was in a movie that the student saw over the weekend, or in a comic that he or she happened to be reading. Whatever it was, if they put it in their journal and explain the reference, it can stand in for what would have otherwise been a quote analysis.

Works Cited and Additional Resources

Asimov, Isaac. Little Lost Robot. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977. Print.

   In this short story, robots have been helping humans for years. Three basic laws have

   been encoded into these robots so deeply that they cannot disobey them. One robot is

   built without a crucial part of one of the laws for industrial convenience. However, it

   soon becomes clear that this has been a grave mistake. This short story goes deeply into

   the mistakes that science can make without ethical and physical safeguards. Had

   Frankenstein's monster been built with the three laws, it would have been a very different

   novel.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Stanley Kubrick. 2001: A Space Odyssey. New York: New American

   Library, 1968. Print.

   When a strange black obelisk appears in the sky, Dr. Dave Bowman and several other

   astronauts are sent into space to investigate. Unfortunately, on the way there, the artificial

   intelligence that is controlling their spaceship begins to act erratically. This is very

   similar to Frankenstein in that a man-made creation is placed in a position of power over

   humans, and it does not go well. Both the short story and the movie are a little advanced

   for young adults, but it is such a ubiquitous story that studying it can be extremely

   rewarding.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, and Gustave Dorei. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. New York:

   Dover Publications, 1970. Print.

   This is one of the most iconic romantic poems of all time. It also involves a sea trip that

   does not go as planned, and it involves the hubris of man. An old mariner grabs a man's

arm on the way to the younger man's wedding and tells him a story of how he once killed

an albatross. The older man's harrowing journey and his ambiguous wisdom is similar in

a lot of ways to <u>Frankenstein</u>, but it is also a deep and touching story in and of itself.

Diaz, Aaron. "Caveman Science Fiction." Dresden Codak. Dresdencodak.com, 22 Sept. 2009.

Web. 06 Dec. 2016.

Dresden Codak is a webcomic that deals exclusively with science fiction and how the line

between human and robot is continually blurred, and will continue to blur. In this

particular comic, Diaz laments the tendency of science fiction to warn of things that

probably won't happen. While not a direct criticism of <u>Frankenstein</u>, easy parallels can be

drawn. For example, scientists were never able to create monstrous men from dead flesh.

Instead, they found ways to cure a number of diseases and learned about how muscles

worked from the very experiments that had Mary Shelley worried.

Donelson, Kenneth L., and Alleen Pace Nilsen. Literature for Today's Young Adults. Glenview,

IL: Scott, Foresman, 1980. Print.

This is this class's textbook, and it contains a tremendous number of resources for young

adults. Its science fiction section is a little bare, unfortunately, but the lists of books and

reviews of them are much more appropriate for a young adult class than difficult

canonical works like <u>Frankenstein</u>.

Don't Reanimate Corpses! Frankenstein Part 1: Crash Course Literature 205. Dir. John Green.

Perf. John Green. Youtube.com. Youtube, 27 Mar. 2014. Web. 5 Dec. 2016.

This is an excellent introduction into the context that surrounds <u>Frankenstein</u>, as well as

an exploration of some of the themes in the novel itself. There is also a part two to this

video, but part one covers everything pretty well. There are a few inaccuracies, but the general idea is quite good for young adults. John Green's Literature Crash Course series is a fantastic resource for most canonical works, and it makes the impenetrable accessible.

DuPrau, Jeanne. The People of Sparks. New York: Random House, 2005. Print.

This novel contains something that is missing from most of the rest of this list of resources: A strong female protagonist. Poppy Mayfleet has to find a way to help her sick younger sister, and this could involve leaving the safety of her home. This dystopian novel is similar to many current young adult novels, but, because it is science fiction, many of its themes can be traced back to Frankenstein. Examining how they are presented differently in this novel can illuminate contemporary priorities when it comes to science fiction.

Kid Cudi - Pursuit Of Happiness Ft. MGMT. Perf. Kid Cudi and MGMT. Youtube.com. Youtube, 8 Dec. 2009. Web. 5 Dec. 2016.

Kid Cudi is a popular artist that was recently diagnosed with clinical depression. This song is about his futile, dangerous attempts to overcome it using drugs and alcohol. The video itself uses a background of a party moving in slow motion while Kid Cudi moves at regular speed, representing the distance between him and those around him. The parallels to Frankenstein are not immediately obvious. However, this does not mean that they do not exist. Cudi's description of a nihilistic way of living features heavily in Shelley's novel, and the video itself is extremely romantic in nature, as the background is used to express Cudi's state of mind.

Poe, Edgar Allan, and Byron Glaser. The Tell-tale Heart. Mankato, MN: Creative Education,

1980. Print.

This short story is yet another extremely darkly romantic piece of fiction. It is told from

the point of view of a murderer who buries his victim beneath his floorboards. However,

his guilt overcomes him and he admits what he has done to the police who come and

knock on his door to ask him some questions. Stylistically and narratively this story is

very similar to Frankenstein, although it focuses more on the emotional aspect than other

works on this list.

Resident Evil. Dir. Paul Anderson. 2002.

Something that contains zombies is essential reading in a unit on Frankenstein. Resident

Evil isn't the deepest or most serious of adaptations, but the fact that Dr. Frankenstein has

been replaced by a faceless corporation obsessed with profits and willing to set aside

safety measures and ethical concerns is a very modern take. When the T-Virus breaks out

of quarantine and contaminates a facility, the AI responsible for preventing a worldwide

outbreak of the pathogens that are being developed locks the facility down. In this case,

there are multiple different "Frankenstein's monsters," and they all serve different

purposes. It is an interesting take.

Tim Burton's the Nightmare before Christmas. Dir. Henry Selick. By Caroline Thompson, Eric

Leighton, Chris Sarandon, and Catherine O'Hara. Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, Inc,

1993. Online.

This stop motion film is about a town that represents the holiday of halloween. One of the

men in this town becomes dissatisfied with his role in life and leaves to try to discover

whether or not there is anything else out there for him. The aesthetics of this piece are

extremely gothic in nature, and can be used to exemplify what the romantics were going

for when they used their environments to paint their inner turmoils on the world around

them.