ENGL 200:"Prometheus Bound & Unbound": Science and Literature from Oral Culture to Digital Media
Meets: MTWTh 11:30am-12:20pm SIG 225
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Office: Padelford B-415
Office Hours: TTh: 12:30-1:30pm

Literature tends to regard science in one of two ways—bound and unbound. Science can be calculated, rational, and set on reducing risk in its progress towards a better world. But, as in the case of the Victor Frankenstein, these characteristics can be exaggerated to the point of destroying the self, others, and even the planet. The bound view may recall images of harmony, invention, and utopia. The unbound view may recall images of chaos, monsters, and dystopia—even apocalypse. While this double-sided coin is a convenient way to describe how literature represents science, can we really say that these books say science is "bad," and some other books say science is "good"? It is more likely the case that science tends to be bound and unbound at the same time, in various ways, and depending on one's perspective; moreover, under closer inspection, it is also more likely the case that literary texts, such as *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, where science seems to be depicted so negatively, actually take a much more nuanced look at their promethean relatives (astronomy, math, biology, chemistry, and physics, as well as the sciences following the digital revolution).

In addition, the title of our class intentionally plays on the word "bound"—as in a "bound book." How has the materiality of literature, from oral culture to digital media, altered our encounters with the text? In light of this question, we will consider how literature influences our cultural representations of science and technology, but we will also reflect on how science and technology have altered our literature, and thus the way we read, think, and feel.

Students will begin with the myth of Prometheus (Aeschylus) and from there will examine pairs of texts that will us put certain ideas into conversation, similar to a debate. Classes will include a variety of approaches, from in-class discussions to hands-on group activities. Grades will be determined based on participation, in-class reflective writing, three mid-sized analyses of the texts, and one group adaptation project with a final presentation. Students will not only access texts through examining representations of and engagements with science, they will actively explore texts by participating in their creation.

Course Works (* indicates a required work for purchase at the University Bookstore)

- Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound,* translated by James Scully and C. John Herington. Oxford University Press, 1975. 9780195061659*
- Butler, Octavia. *Dawn*. Aspect, 1997. 978-0446603775*
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never Let Me Go*. Vintage, 2006. 978-1400078776*
- Levine, Ken. *BioShock*. 2K Boston/Irrational Games, 2007. **Note:** *BioShock* is a video game and will be on reserve throughout the term in the library.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*. Edited by J. Paul Hunter, 2nd ed., Norton, 2011. 978-0-3393-92793-1* (this edition includes important secondary readings)
- Stevenson, Robert Lewis. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Dover, 1991. 0486266885*
- Cavendish, Margaret. *A Description of the Blazing World*

Course Resources

The schedule, assignment prompts, and writing resources will be made available on the Homepage and Modules on Canvas. Scores and feedback on assignments will be made available through Canvas as well.

The rest of your reading materials will be delivered on a PDF sent at the beginning of class. This PDF contains all secondary sources and should be printed out in full.

Course Outcomes

1) Students will develop and demonstrate an understanding of select literary concepts, devices, and genres, from narrative structures to the epistolary novel, in an attempt to better understand how literature represents, celebrates, and/or critiques science and Prometheanism.

2) Students will investigate ethical approaches to texts, treating the novel or short story not only as a work of art, but as a test case for living one's life.

3) Students will acquire an in-depth understanding of the vocabulary used to analyze various media, from oral speech to contemporary video games.

4) Students will engage with and practice adaptation as a mode of accessing, critiquing, and preserving texts—but also making new ones.

5) Students are encouraged to take risks in their thinking, feeling, and writing. Oftentimes, taking risks means avoiding the first question or comment, argument, or approach that comes to mind (and going with the second, third, or fourth).

6) Students will improve their academic writing skills, with particular emphasis on focus, organization, argument, support (evidence), and generic awareness.

Goals and Expectations of the Course:

Goals for the Class:

To create a learning community in which each student's experiences and perspectives are valued, and we learn to listen carefully to each other, and to examine our own perspectives and positions.

To develop a greater appreciation for the ways that science and literature (broadly speaking) are in a developmental relationship together—rather than operating in total isolation.

To challenge our ideas about the nature of artworks. Are they "just entertainment"? Or do they play a far more significant role in determining who we are?

To consider not only how art objects (literature) impact us or how we think and feel, but also how they impact the way we relate to other humans and non-humans.

To think about the way artworks have changed over the centuries, and how changes in our everyday media contribute to the evolution of human consciousness.

Expectations of Students:

Texts will be excerpted and abridged when possible to help students balance the demands of contemporary college life. In turn, students are expected to read all assigned work, to make notes and

annotations (which means writing on paper or digital copies: there will be a short lesson on taking notes), and to raise questions in class with respect to assigned texts.

Students ought to be respectful to peers' and instructors' questions and comments. If you disagree with an opinion, try formulating your response in terms of a question (rather than an attack). Oftentimes, what offends us is based on a misunderstanding: attacks reinforce confusions whereas questions untangle them.

Students should take risks in their thinking, conversations, and writing. Students who go "above and beyond," who contribute their most radical questions and ideas, and who share their feelings and frustrations will be rewarded most. After all, it's a class on Prometheanism!

Final word:

Please view this classroom experience as something other than a requirement for graduation. We have ten weeks together. **Let's make the most of it because these are our lives**. They matter. Our time matters. Let's not waste it. It is my wish that you consider this class as an integral part of your life (it is an integral part of mine). We are here to learn, grow, and change. These should not be empty words to you. Rather, they should be scary, frustrating, and difficult. Change can be very difficult. But if we have not changed by the end of ten weeks, then we have learned little or nothing—only then can we say that we have truly failed. And yet, if we are still frustrated at the end of ten weeks, then perhaps we are on the edge of a new plateau of thought and feeling, a new way of seeing ourselves, or appreciating others.

Assignments

In-class Reflective Writing (1 point each/5%)
In-class writing assignments are for the purpose of encouraging inquiry beyond the class discussion. Sometimes these will be collected for participation points. Students will receive written feedback, primarily in the form of questions; thereby providing "food for thought" in hopes of developing a larger and more complicated inquiry (for major assignments). These assignments do not count towards the W credit (see below).

Major Assignment 1: Definition of Prometheanism (100 points/20%)
The first major assignment is an academic analysis of a literary text, but one that focuses primarily on the definition of a concept, in this case "Prometheanism." Students will engage with primary text(s) and secondary texts assigned in class. Additional research is not required. Students are strongly encouraged in this essay to consider how the addition of a new medium (e.g. written words, numbers, and figures) is a key component to Prometheanism. Essays will be 2 single-spaced pages to meet the W credit (roughly 1,200 words), and otherwise should follow MLA style formatting (see the Online Writing Lab or OWL for instructions). Students will receive numerical scores and qualitative feedback corresponding with each outcome that the assignment targets.

Major Assignment 2: Genre Study *or* Opinion Paper (100 points/20%)
This assignment asks students to analyze the generic conventions of *Frankenstein* and *Never Let Me Go*, **or** the ethical issue of producing "life," e.g. clones. In the first instance, students can argue how the development of particular generic convention contributes to the rhetorical effectiveness (its realness, believability, or persuasiveness) of the printed word. Or, rather than analyze the text for its formal or rhetorical dimensions, students can consider the moral dilemma at the heart of the novels. What position do you think the author(s) take (if any) in relation to artificial life? Where do you stand on the issue, and why? Students are encouraged in this assignment, especially, to play with their own genres and/or media. Essays (in whatever form they take) must include roughly 1,200 words, and should follow MLA style formatting where appropriate. Students will receive numerical scores and qualitative feedback corresponding with

each outcome that the assignment targets depending on the student's path. **Note:** students should indicate on page one which option they have pursued.

Major Assignment 3: Collaborative Literary Analysis of Promethean Media (100 points/20%)
The third major assignment will also be a literary analysis, but students will work collaboratively as a pair or group of three. Each student will receive the same score for the assignment so it is imperative that students work together and distribute the workload evenly. Essays will be 2 single-spaced pages to meet the W credit (roughly 1,200 words), and otherwise should follow MLA style formatting (see the Online Writing Lab (OWL) for instructions). Students will receive numerical scores and qualitative feedback corresponding with each outcome that the assignment targets.

Adaptation Project and Presentation (100 points/20%)

In this assignment, students will explore the world of media adaptations by designing a contemporary version of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Students will work in groups and will have the freedom to design and/or build (depending on the level of complexity) any artifact of their choosing. Consider a problem from one of the primary texts? What is your purpose in making this adaptation? Who is your audience. And of course, what is the best medium for reaching this audience? On the final day of class, students will present their artifacts. During presentations, groups will have the opportunity to present their project, explain their decisions, and answer classmates' questions. Projects will be graded by the instructor (70%) and peers (30%), based on several criteria. The purpose of the project is to learn new methods for engaging with literary forms; to understand the theory of adaptation and the production of artworks; and to consider how altering the medium of a work can alter the audience's reading experience.

Final Reflection (5 points/5%)
The final reflection will ask you to meditate on speculative fiction more broadly. It is a chance for you to connect what we have learned to your personal life in school and outside of academia. The reflection will be one single-spaced page. Your feedback will come in the form of questions for the future or "food for thought."

Extra-credit (up to 2%)
One of the classic Promethean films is *Bladerunner* (1982). Because *Bladerunner2049* will be released this fall, students may choose to write a review on one or both *Bladerunner* films. Because the value of the extra credit is substantial, students are encouraged to treat it with the same level of seriousness as any assignment.

With the exception of in-class writing, all assignments should be submitted electronically via Canvas (unless otherwise negotiated between the student(s) and instructor). Each assignment will have its own rubric according to the course outcomes it targets. After one week of submitting your work, if you believe that I have made an error in my assessment or that you have not received feedback, please notify me immediately via email.

Assessment

60% Major Assignments
20% Adaptation Project
10% Reflective Writing
10% Participation

W-Credit: This class has been designed to meet "W-Course Criteria," and requires no special arrangement on the part of the student. According to the university: "A W course must require 10-15 pages of graded, out-of-class writing, in the form of a longer paper plus a revision *or* two or more short papers."

Participation and Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all classes prepared to discuss assigned readings with partners, in small groups, and as a class. Unexcused absences will result in .5% deduction from your participation grade. Ten absences will result in a zero for participation. In-class written assignments are worth 1% of participation each. Participation in Major Assignment Two is mandatory and worth 4% of your participation grade, as determined by your peers.

Late Work:
Each assignment will have a prompt available under Modules in Canvas. Deadlines for each assignment will be clearly marked in the prompt. Once the deadline has passed for an assignment, submissions will no longer be granted and the student will have to discuss the matter with the instructor. Late papers lose one point per day.

Plagiarism / Academic Dishonesty:

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is a form of misrepresentation; it is the act of presenting a different author's ideas or writing as your own.

Plagiarism includes the following:
• failing to cite sources
• failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
• failing to cite sources of specific language and/or passages, i.e. quotes.
• submitting someone else's work as your own, i.e. substantial parts or the whole essay are written by someone other than the student
If you are unsure what plagiarism is or how to cite materials, please see the instructor or read the pages on "plagiarism" and "summarizing, quoting, and paraphrasing" at the Online Writing Lab (OWL). Because some cases of plagiarism follow from innocent confusion, if I suspect that material has been plagiarized, first the student will meet with me to discuss the matter in person. To receive credit, the student will have to re-write the assignment following proper MLA style formatting. As for the grade, the same policy regarding late work will apply (above).

If the problem persists, the student will receive a zero for the assignment and the incident will be reported to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Please review the College's policy here:
http://depts.washington.edu/grading/pdf/FacultyInfo.pdf

Commitment to Diversity, Emotional and Intellectual Growth, and Future Applications

Because it is the aim of this course to include a wide array of views, students of color and minority students are especially encouraged to speak in class, ask questions, and lead group discussions. Some views expressed in class may conflict with students' beliefs and values. While discussions of race, gender, and sexuality especially may challenge students' personal perspectives, please bear in mind that **all materials in this course are intended to challenge personal perspectives**. So if the goal in this class is to grow intellectually and emotionally, students (and the instructor) are expected to question the limitations of their personal histories "to make room" for the personal experiences of others.

But the path to emotional and intellectual growth may not be won merely by challenging one's own personal beliefs and values. To embrace new ideas, skills, and values for future use in different contexts, we must also conduct personal investigations that ask why our views are being challenged in the first place. Ultimately, this course is not intended to merely increase our knowledge of a list of literary terms, but more importantly to alter the fundamental ways in which we understand ourselves and our relationships to other people and non-humans.

Accommodations

If you have a registered disability that requires accommodation, please see me immediately. If you have a disability and have not yet registered it with the UW Disability Service Office, please contact DSO at (206) 543-8925 or via their website, http://www.washington.edu/admin/dso/. I will do my best to provide appropriate accommodations for you.

A Quick Guide to "Prometheus Bound and Unbound"

Module 1: Promethean Minds

Aeschylus' *Prometeheus Bound* (456/5 B.C.) → Margaret Cavendish's "The Circle of the Brain" (1653)
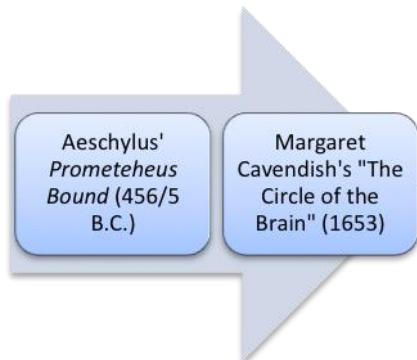
- What is Prometheanism?
- What does it mean to be an oral culture?
- What is the impact of introducing writing (letters/numbers) to human society?
- What are the limits of human knowledge?
- What are the repercussions of "accessing" the human brain?

Module 2: Promethean Children

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) → Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

- What genres adopt the Promethean myth and how do they change it over time?
- How does print media represent print media and to what effect?
- How does a medium and/or generic convention *make something happen*?
- Should humans produce artificial life, and what are the consequences of doing so?

Module 3: Promethean Technics

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) → Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1987)
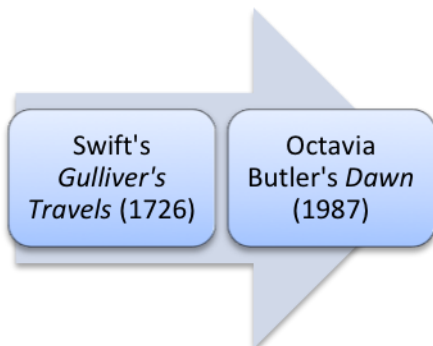
- How does unbinding the book alter literature?
- What happens when media from different times collide?
- How does the subtraction of media alter human conditions and human nature?
- How might the addition of futuristic or alien media alter human conditions and human nature?

Module 4: Promethean Bodies

Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) → Kevin Levine's *Bioshock* (2007)
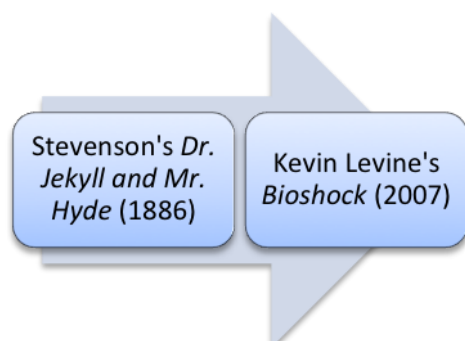
- How does the introduction of digital media alter literary forms?
- How does the narrative condition readers' encounters with a text?
- How does altering the manipulating the body altering the body reshape human nature?

Course Calendar

Module 1: Promethean Minds

DATE / TOPIC	CLASS ACTIVITIES	TEXTS COVERED	HOMEWORK
9/25			
9/26			
9/27	**First day of class:** Meet and Greet Syllabus		**Read:** Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* (lines 1-260)
9/28	**Discuss** Goals and Expectations **In-class reflection:** Personal goals/expectations for the class **Discuss** Beginning *Prometheus Bound* **Inquiry:** What is significant about performing *PB*?	Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* (lines 1-260)	**Read** *Prometheus Bound* (to the end) **Read** Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (excerpt) **Read** Abrams' "Myth" **Reading Guide Qs:** *Prometheus Bound*

Week 2

10/2 **What is Prometheanism?**	**Define** Myth **Discuss** *Prometheus Bound* **In-class inquiry:** What is "oral culture"?	Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (excerpt)	**Read** Ray Brassier's "Prometheanism and Its Critics"
10/3	**Discuss** What is Prometheanism? **Discuss:** MA1	Ray Brassier's "Prometheanism and Its Critics"	**Read** Margaret Cavendish's "The Circle of the Brain Cannot be Squared" (1653) **Read** Roberto Bertuol's "The Square Circle of Margaret Cavendish"
10/4	**Discuss** "The Circle of the Brain"	Margaret Cavendish's "The Circle of the Brain	**Read** McLuhan *Understanding Media*

	In-class inquiry: What are some contemporary examples of "mathematizing the brain"?	Cannot be Squared" (1653) Roberto Bertuol's "The Square Circle of Margaret Cavendish" Phillip K. Dick, *Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep?* (excerpt)	(excerpt)
10/5	**Activity:** Hot and Cool Media **Inquiry:** Is "Prometheanism" the introduction of the cool? **Discuss** MA1 **Skills Acquisition:** Dialectical method **Skills Acquisition:** In-text citation and bibliographies	McLuhan, "Hot and Cool" Media	**Write** MA1 **Read:** Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* vol. I **Read** "Novel" (253-55 required) **Read** one of the following, Butler's "*Frankenstein* and Radical Science," Mellor's *Frankenstein*, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril; Goodall's "Electrical Romanticism," Knellwolf's "Geographic Boundaries and Inner Space," as a group of four students. **Write** a short summary of your assigned essay. **Bring** three copies for your group on 10/10. **Reading Guide Qs:** *Frankenstein*, vol. I

Module II: Promethean Children

10/9	**Definition:** The Epistolary Novel **Inquiry:** Beyond the Bounds of Human Experience	Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. I	**Read:** Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* vol. II **Reading Guide Qs:** *Frankenstein*, vol. II

	Inquiry: Privilege and Prometheanism **Writing Workshop:** Talking Through MA1		**Read** "Gothic Novel"
10/10	**Definition:** Gothic Novel **Discuss** articles on *Frankenstein* and science	Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. I&II	**Read** "The Sublime"
10/11	**Definition:** the sublime	Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. I&II Abrams' "The Sublime"	
10/12	**Methods and Theories:** "Distant Reading" **Writing Workshop:** Peer Review MA1	Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. I&II Franco Moretti: *Maps, Graphs, and Trees* (excerpt)	**Read** *Frankenstein*, vol. III **Reading Guide Qs:** *Frankenstein*, vol. III **Read** Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (*NLMG*), vol. I **Due**: MA1 10/15 at 10am

Week 4

10/16		Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, vol. III	**Reading Guide Qs:** *NLMG*, vol. I
10/17	**In-class Activity:** The Trial of Victor Frankenstein **Discuss:** MA2	Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*	
10/18		Kazuo Ishiguro, *NLMG*, vol. I	**Reading Guide Qs:** *NLMG*, vol. II

10/19		Kazuo Ishiguro, *NLMG*, vol. I	

Week 5

10/23	**Discuss** *NLMG,* vol. I. **Skills Acquisition:** Context, Conversation, Claim, and Stakes	Kazuo Ishiguro, *NLMG*, vol. I	**Watch:** *Žižek, Ideology (clip: They Live)* **Start** introduction outline of MA2
10/24	**Writing Workshop:** Talking Through MA2 **Skills Acquisition:** The dialectical method for the body of the paper	Kazuo Ishiguro, *NLMG*, vol. II *Žižek, Ideology (clip: They Live)*	
10/25	**Discuss** *NLMG*, vol. III **Skills Acquisition:** Conclusion	Kazuo Ishiguro, *NLMG*, vol. III Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say,* "Yes/No/Okay, But"	**Read** Douglas, Powell, and Savulescu's "Is the Creation of Artificial Life Morally Significant?"
10/26	**Inquiry: Should Humans Make Artificial Life?** **Writing Workshop:** Peer review MA2	Douglas, Powell, and Savulescu's "Is the Creation of Artificial Life Morally Significant?" Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (excerpt)	

Module III: Promethean Technics

10/30	**Lecture:** Additional Media/Media Archaeology **Media Experiment:** "Blind Conversation" **Reflection:** Media and Ability	Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666, excerpt) Spiller, "Reading Through Galileo's Telescope" (excerpt)	
10/31	**Inquiry:** Are Colonialism and Prometheanism Related?	Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, "A Voyage to Lilliput"	
11/1	**Discuss:** The addition and subtraction of media in *GT* **Discuss** MA3 **Writing Workshop:** Selecting Partners and Writing Collaboratively	Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms" Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (excerpt) Losh, *Understanding Rhetoric* (excerpt on collaboration)	**Read** Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read* (introduction)
11/2	Visit to Special Collections with Sandra Kroupa		

Week 7

11/6	**Activity:** Drawing the Oankoli	Butler's *Dawn*, "Womb"	**Read** Susan Morris "Black Girls Are From the Future"
11/7	**Define** Afrofuturism **Inquiry:** Is *Dawn* about a slave ship?	Butler's *Dawn*, "Family"	
11/8		Butler's *Dawn*, "Nursery"	

11/9	**Writing Workshop:** Outline with Partners	Butler's *Dawn*, "Nursery"	

Module IV: Promethean Bodies

11/13		Butler's *Dawn*, "Training Floor"	
11/14	**Writing Workshop:** Writing MA3		**Read** Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* **Read** Frances Power Cobbe's *Unconscious Cerebration*
11/15		Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Frances Power Cobbe's *Unconscious Cerebration*	**Read** Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* **Read** Sir Humphry Davy, *Discourse, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry* (excerpt)
11/16		Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Sir Humphry Davy, *Discourse, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry* (excerpt)	**Read** Cobly's *Narrative* (excerpt)

Week 9

11/20		Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (film clip) *The Matrix* (film clip)	**Read** Pointon, "BioShock's Meta-Narrative"

11/21	**Define** Metanarrative, Non-linear narrative **Inquiry:** Avatars: "How Am I Not Myself?"	*BioShock* (2007) Pointon, "BioShock's Meta-Narrative"	
11/22	**Design and Make** a non-linear game **Reflection:**		
11/23	**No class**		

Week 10

11/27	**Theories and Methodologies:** Adaptation **Select** groups for Adaptation Project	Julie Sanders, "What is Adaptation?" (excerpt) Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (excerpt)	
11/28	**Design and Make** adaptations for presentations		
11/29	**Design and Make** adaptations for presentations		
11/30	**Design and Make** adaptations for presentations		

Week 11:

12/4	**Design and Make** adaptations for		

	presentations		
12/5	**Presentations**		
12/6	**Presentations**		
12/7	**Conclusion**		

Week 12: Finals Week

12/11			
12/12			
12/13			
12/14			