*Highlights of European Literature:* ***Shelley***

**Main Focus of Lecture:**

**Frankenstein: Background and Composition**

* Ghost Stories
  + Location: Villa Diodati, Lake Geneva
  + People Gathered:
    - Lord Byron 🡪 Forced to leave England because of a scandalous separation from wife (and alleged affair with half-sister); also, in soaring debt
    - John William Polidori
    - Percy Shelley 🡪 Left pregnant wife with 16 year old Mary Godwin
    - Mary Shelley 🡪 Aged 18 with two children already
    - Claire Clairmont 🡪 Mary’s step sister who had had affairs with both Percy Sherry and Byron back in England
  + Weather: Coldest and stormiest on record at the time (The year without summer)
  + Reading about Science and Other knowledge and decide to have a writing competition
    - Bryon and Percy Shelley give up
    - Polidori writes a short narrative about a vampire (still considered prominent in vampire tradition)
    - For Mary, she beings the journey towards *Frankenstein*
* Two major influences on novel:
  + Mary’s complicated family background
  + Broad and voracious reading
* Mary’s Family Background
  + Mother: Mary Wollstonecraft 🡪 Died 11 days after Mary’s birth
    - Leading feminist figure
  + Father: William Godwin
    - Leading political thinker; anarchy
  + Father disapproves of Mary’s relationship with Percy; they elope and go to Europe
    - Return completely broke
  + Read on scientific discoveries and theory

**Frankenstein and Science**

* Mary Shelley and Humphry Davy
  + Mary at 14 years old goes to lecture on chemistry at Royal Institution in Albemarle Street London
  + Lecture given by Davy on chemistry
* Who is Humphry Davy?
  + Fun Fact: experimented with “laughing gas” as anesthetic for surgery
  + Main scientific contribution was in the field of electrochemistry, a field he invented by conducting experiments in which he used electricity to isolate certain chemical elements.
  + Known Davy’s *Discourse Introductory to Lectures on Chemistry* was read by Shelley in the 1816 (When writing *Frankenstein).*
    - Discussion on creative powers of science 🡪 the ways science can create nature rather than merely understand it (active vs. passive)
    - The scientist as someone *mastering* nature
    - Used to the cultivation and happiness of mankind
    - Idea of “useful arts” 🡪 Sciences and arts working together for the betterment of society
      * Distinction between science and art is a nineteenth century phenomenon.
      * Davy’s and Darwin wrote poetry, for instance and Bryon and Shelley took an interest in science
  + Electricity was more new, and the idea of Galvanism (which we will come back to) was prevalent in his work.

**Frankenstein and Science**

* Animation Scene in Film vs. Book
  + Book: Victor Frankenstein terrified of his creation
  + Adaptation: Victor Frankenstein thrilled
  + Note: Shelley’s novel only sold 500 copies when it was first published and only became a hit after it had been adapted for the stage by Richard Brinsley Peake in 1823, under the title *Presumption*; or *The* *Fate of Frankenstein*
* Scientific Theory and the 19th Century
  + For the original audience of the novel, the emphasis on life was clearly embedded the novel in contemporaneous ideas about what ‘life’ actually was, how it could be studied scientifically, how it could be mastered by understanding it, and how the science of life could contribute to a better, just society, but also how science conflicted with religious dogma and could potentially turn traditional definitions of life upside down.

**Frankenstein and Science**

* Mary Shelley and Galvanism
  + Mentioned in preface to 1831 edition (with Mentions of Darwin too)
* What is Galvanism?
  + The science of the generation of electrical current by chemical action.
  + Theory that electricity could reanimate dead bodies, infuse dead matter with “life”
* Founder: Luigi Galvani
  + Notice that frog legs twitched when hit with electricity after death
  + Link between electricity/life; muscular movement produced by electrical currents
* Giovanni Aldini (Nephew of Galvani)
  + Aldini put electrical currents to dead body of George Forster (who was executed by hanging)
  + Report discuses motion of the dead body (eye opening, arms moving, etc.)
* Second Scientific Revolution
  + These breakthroughs in chemistry, biology and physics around the turn of the century, the discovery of self-generating and adaptive life-forms, and the study of electric energy and its interaction with organic matter
  + Shelley’s very interested in Second Scientific Revolution
  + Copernicus 🡪 First Scientific Revolution

**Frankenstein and Science**

* Mary Shelley and Erasmus Darwin
  + Mentions Darwin as someone she was reading while at Villa Diodati
* Who is Erasmus Darwin?
  + Natural Philosopher, Inventor, and Poet
  + Grandson Charles Darwin
  + Vorticella 🡪 a protozoa that lives in moist soil
    - Darwin found this so interesting because they are said to remain dead for many days or weeks, but quickly able to recover life and motion by the fresh addition of water and warmth
    - Seems as if they can be reanimated
  + Proposed ideas of self-generating life forms and could reanimate themselves out of a death-like state

**Frankenstein and Science**

* Davy’s and Professor Waldman
  + Davy’s can be seen in the character of Waldman who is the idealist Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Ingolstadt
  + Mentor and Friend to Frankenstein

**Frankenstein and Science**

* Science and Politics
  + Note how the creature, who is not created from an Vitalist position, is
  + Perhaps the spirit of the creature is that of the revolution
  + The creatures is an animalistic life form that develops itself into advanced stages without external guidance
  + Empowers the creature to stand up to his creator

**Frankenstein and Science**

* The “Vitality Debate”
  + What is Life? And how do Living Beings differ from dead or inanimate matter?
  + Vitalist Position (John Abernethy): Conservative answer 🡪 Life is a force superadded to the body
    - the body cannot generate life by itself
    - Tries to unify science with religious beliefs (invokes force akin to soul as central to the explanation of life)
    - Receive life from God.
    - And the Church accepted this
  + Materialist Position (William Lawrence): Progressive Answer 🡪 humankind, like animals, is a life form that is driven by its own mechanisms and autonomously adapts to its environment. Doesn’t need an external source
    - Former student of Abernethy
    - Conceives man as a variety of animal (man is the most perfect of domesticated animals
    - Radical because of its political implications 🡪 If man is a self-generating and autonomous life form that does not need a ‘soul’ or any other superadded source of life, than he is emancipated from traditional forms of authority
  + Note how Percy and Mary’s parents were anarchists. To with the political implications in mind, Frankenstein engages with different discussions

**Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (1859-85)**

* What is this?
  + 12 Narrative Poems
  + Reinterprets Arthurian Legend for Victorian audience
  + Dedicated to Albert, Prince Consort
  + Arthur as embodiment of Victorian Ideals who fails to lift his Knights at Camelot to the same ideal level (betrayals of Lancelot and Mordred)
  + Gothic, Dark, Lost World

**Thomas Malory’s *Morte Dartur* (1469)**

* Background
  + Thomas Malory was a Solider (knighted in 1441) and member of parliament (1443)
  + Negative Side: Thief, Kidnapper, and Rapist who was imprisoned in 1452
  + Writes *Morte Dartur* while in Newgate Prison (1469-1470)
* From Manuscript to Print (*The Death of Arthur)*
  + Instead of being written in verse, Malory reworks some of the most famous Arthurian tales into prose
  + Includes translations/interpretations from the *Vulgate Cycle*
  + Supplemented by Malory’s own original material (the Gareth Story)
  + Best-known work of English-language Arthurian literature today
* William Caxton
  + Publisher (possibly the one to have introduced the printing press in England in 1476)
  + 1485 – one of the first gooks published by him is Malory’s text)
* Style
  + Historical Fantasy
  + Historicity questioned
* Popularity wanes until 19th century
  + 1816: *Morte Dartur* reprinted for first time since 1634