Introduction

This signature assignment for INT 101 consists of a cluster of writing assignments, three informal and one formal, involving a novel we read in my section, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The informal papers are dailies, which are one-page papers that accompany most of the reading assignments for the class. I typically email my students the writing prompt a day before the next class meeting. Students use these informal assignments to focus their reading, practice and get feedback on their writing, and generate ideas for class discussion. For my signature assignment these informal writing assignments provide scaffolding for the formal paper, a researched proposal and critical analysis. Students typically receive the formal paper prompt three weeks before the due date, and a peer-review workshop precedes the due date by three to five days.

For the purposes of Mercer’s QEP, this signature assignment is designed to introduce students to the foundational concepts of critically analyzing problems and how they might be addressed. The important and transferable skills of analysis, solution generation, and ethical thinking are emphasized. The use of a fictional problem rather than a contemporary one may seem counterintuitive, but I believe it serves as effective scaffolding for later work with service and research. A novel presents in a full and detail-rich manner a hypothetical case study for analysis and speculation. The problem that the characters face and debate is deeply explored by the reader in an engaging manner. Furthermore, the novelist’s presentation of ambiguous details, ethical dilemmas, and conflicting perspectives provides a useful subject for students; the novel provides sufficient information to support multiple readings, interpretations, and proposals for solutions to the fictional problem.
Informal Paper #1
(to accompany our reading of the second volume of *Frankenstein*)

In Volume II, Chapter IX of *Frankenstein* the Creature concludes the narrative of his life and demands that Victor create a second being to be his companion. The Creature insists, “What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself …. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel. Oh! my creator, make me happy” (112). Victor ultimately agrees to this demand.

Both the Creature and Victor employ ethical arguments as they discuss the proposal. For tomorrow’s daily, summarize the ethical claims the creature offers in support of his demand, and the ethical reasons Victor considers both for and against creating a female creature. Quote at least one textual passage to represent each perspective, and practice building a full “quotation sandwich” for each passage; cite the page numbers using the parenthetical citation model from MLA format. Follow your summary and quotations with a brief discussion of the two following questions: At this point in the novel, which character’s arguments seem more ethically compelling to you? Looking at your own experiences and values, what core ethical beliefs do you have that lead you to favor one character’s perspective?
Informal Paper #2
(to accompany our reading of the third volume of Frankenstein)

In Volume III, Chapter III of Frankenstein Victor has second thoughts about his promise and destroys his work on the female creature. This decision ultimately costs him his best friend, his bride, his father, his comfort, and his life. Yet on his death bed (in Volume III, Chapter VII) Victor insists it was the correct choice. He tells Walton,

> In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards my fellow-creatures had greater claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature. (171)

A few pages later in his final scene, the Creature views Victor's act quite differently ((175–178).

Present the perspective of each character and analyze their viewpoints. Quote at least one textual passage to represent each perspective, and practice building a full “quotation sandwich” for each passage; cite the page numbers using the parenthetical citation model from MLA format. Then briefly discuss the following questions. Do you find the perspective of one character more ethically correct than the other, and if so why? Does Mary Shelley seem to favor one character’s perspective more than the other’s?
Informal Paper #3
(to accompany our reading of our textbook’s supplemental materials, including early reviews of *Frankenstein*)

The early reviewers of Mary Shelley’s novel disagreed on what the moral of *Frankenstein* might be, or whether it even had one. These passages illustrate examples of that dispute:

- John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review* insists, “Our taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is—it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality” (377).

- An anonymous critic in *Belle Assemblée* worries the novel might be impious but then offers, “We hope, however the writer had the moral in view which we are desirous of drawing from it, that the presumptive works of man must be frightful, vile, and horrible; ending only in discomfort and misery to himself” (385).

- An anonymous reviewer in *The British Critic* complains, “We need scarcely say, that these volumes have neither principle, object, nor moral” (388).

- Percy Bysshe Shelley, the novelist’s husband, wrote an anonymous review for *The Athenæum* in which he proclaimed “In this the direct moral of the book exists; and it is perhaps the most important, and of the most universal application, of any moral that can be enforced by example. Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked” (400).

Clearly different readers bring to a text diverse perspectives and values, which influence how they read and interpret that text.

Do you find a moral message in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*? Focus your discussion on the creature’s demand for a companion, and Victor’s responses to that demand. Quote at least one textual passage to support your claim about the novel’s moral message, and practice building a full “quotation sandwich” for the passage; cite the page numbers using the parenthetical citation model from MLA format.
Victor Frankenstein’s fateful act of creating a living, sentient being is the catalyst for Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, which explores the dramatic and ethical consequences of that act as perceived by multiple characters, each of whom expresses his perspective. Shelley fractures the novel into first-person narratives, told by Walton, Frankenstein, and his Creature, the better to engage the readers’ imaginative response to their interactions and conflicts. Throughout the novel Shelley poses ethical dilemmas and constructs the narrative in a way to invite readers to imagine alternate courses of action. The foremost example is the problem of whether Victor should create a female companion for his Creature. The reader is led to consider whether another creation would solve the dilemma or compound the error, would be fair to the Creature or dangerous to all mankind.

**Instructions:**
For this paper you will propose a solution to the dilemma of whether Victor should carry out his Creature’s demand for a companion. You should first summarize and critically analyze the perspectives concerning this issue expressed by the Creature and Victor in the novel. Base your analysis on specific textual examples. Drawing on your previous dailies, articulate the ethical reasoning displayed by both characters, and consider how their values and experiences have shaped their perspectives. Next, list several possible ways to resolve the dilemma, and briefly indicate the ethical and practical reasons for and against each option. Finally, propose one solution as the best way to resolve the problem. Defend your proposal by articulating the ethical reasons, as well as the practical ones, for choosing that option. Remember that “planting a naysayer” in your discussion, to use the term from *They Say/I Say*, is an effective strategy to help persuade your reader, so be sure to consider possible problems with your solution, too. Finally, share how your core values and experiences shape your choice of a solution to this fictional problem.
Incorporate into your discussion at least one quotation from a secondary source, such as one of the original reviews of *Frankenstein* or a more recent critic writing in a peer-reviewed journal. Be sure to construct a “quotation sandwich” to identify this source fully, to establish the context for the quotation, and to connect it to your proposal. You will use the MLA format, so you will need to provide parenthetical citations for all paraphrases, summaries and quotations, and a Works Cited page in which you list your sources. I also want you to concentrate on the organization of this paper: make sure that your paragraphs have appropriate topic sentences, that you use transitional phrases to clarify the logical flow of your ideas, and that you omit points which do not explicitly support your thesis. More successful papers will clearly incorporate rhetorical moves from *They Say / I Say*. If you do not understand how to organize a paragraph or use MLA format, consult the appropriate sections in *Little BearHandbook*.

**Draft Workshop:**
For the draft workshop, find a partner in the class and exchange drafts. You must give your draft to your partner by Sunday, November 2, so that your partner can read it and prepare comments prior to our draft workshop the next day. During the workshop class you will talk to each other about your remarks, and discuss ways to revise the paper to make it more effective. As before, you may have more than one partner. When you submit your finished paper, include with it your draft, your partner's comments, and a one-page reflection on what you learned from your partner and what you decided to revise in your draft.

Your paper is due in class. I will penalize late papers by one letter grade per day. Please see me if it appears your paper will not be finished on time. I will be happy to examine your drafts and to discuss your paper with you.