

# Images of Women in Literature

## The Man-Made Woman: Technology and Women's Bodies

Fall 2012  
ENGL 285.001  
TR 11:30-12:45

Professor Cari Carpenter

*"How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips."*

-Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's classic tale of an ambitious young man who uses electricity and a bit of alchemy to produce a new life form raises critical questions about the implications of (literally) man-made technology. Keeping Shelley's horrifying vision in mind, we will examine how technologies, often developed and controlled by white men, have affected the representations and realities of women's bodies in the nineteenth and twentieth-century U.S. We will consider technology in a broad sense, as those innovations and practices that promise to improve people's lives--including the skin-lightening and hair-straightening products that were directed at African American women in the early 1900s and the contemporary "hands-free" breast-pump that enables women to work and breast feed simultaneously. Throughout the term, we will ask a series of questions: If we understand technology as that which improves lives, to which lives do we refer? What exactly does "improvement" mean in this context? In this new millennium, we should also consider women's development and implementation of technology. What does a feminist technology look like? What is the relationship between women and technology in today's literary and cultural representations? We will approach these questions by examining a variety of technologies including plastic surgery, the workplace, reproduction, and medicine.