

“MONSTROUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE CASE OF *FRANKENSTEIN*”

Arden Hegele, Columbia University

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In this talk, Arden Hegele (Ph.D. Candidate, English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University) investigates the relationship between lifewriting and the medical case study by considering their intersection in the 19th-century genre of the 'pathography'—the autobiographical narrative of illness. She argues that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a fictional pathography that adopts generic tenets exemplified in the historical 1726 manuscript testimonies of Mary Toft, “who deceived George I's doctors into thinking she had given birth to 17 rabbits.” The hybridity of the pathographic form generates narratorial unreliability in both patients and doctors, and is connected thematically to monstrosity through textual *copia* nested narration—features that we see not only in *Frankenstein*, but also in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Romantic pathography illuminates and interrogates the notions of authority, wholeness, and normality that continue to sustain both modern medical discourse and literary criticism.

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