This exhibit explores the scientific and literary environment in which Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, or *The Modern Prometheus* was first conceived and written. An enduring classic, her story of scientific ambition and creation gone awry has spawned endless creatures of its own, from a theatrical version that opened within a few years of the novel’s first publication in 1818 to more than 30 films, the latest of which was just released in December 2015.

The essential – and sensational – struggle between Victor Frankenstein and his “unnatural” Creature remains at the core of most of these adaptations. But less familiar are many of the era-specific debates and opportunities that inform Frankenstein’s experiment and his Creature’s development, as Shelley first imagined them. Begun during a story-writing challenge among friends in the summer of 1816, and revised several times during Shelley’s lifetime, her *Frankenstein* reflects contemporary, intertwined developments in the natural sciences and in literary views of the natural world. Such issues not only help drive the story but suggest important connections among the novel’s primary characters.

The materials in this exhibit generally date from the late-18th century, the time period during which *Frankenstein* is set, through the mid-19th century, when Mary Shelley died. Written from the heart of the Romantic Era, the novel is also both strongly influenced by scientific work that had gone before and indicative of what might follow. For Union College this time period was also formative. Many of the items in this exhibit were part of the “First Purchase” of books and scientific instruments acquired upon the founding of the College in 1795. Others were acquired or annotated later by students eagerly engaged with the same kinds of texts, events, and ideas that inspired Mary Shelley.

Welcome to The World of Frankenstein.