

Welcome to Bard!

My name is Erica Kaufman, and I am the interim academic director of the Bard College Language and Thinking Program. I am writing to introduce myself and to tell you about some of the work that we will be doing together in August.

Before you arrive in Annandale in August, you should purchase and read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Please bring the book with you to Bard. You are also encouraged to purchase Sophocles' *Antigone* ahead of your arrival. We'll read *Antigone* together during August, so you don't need to have read it before you come. (You may also purchase *Antigone* at the College bookstore when you arrive on campus.)

Mary Shelley was 18 when she began writing *Frankenstein*, and the first edition was published in London in 1818 when she was 20. Sophocles is thought to have been much older when he wrote *Antigone*, about 56 years old, and the play was first performed in Athens in 441 BCE. Yet, despite the differences in the authors' ages and historical contexts, the texts overlap in startling ways. Both Shelley and Sophocles pose difficult and searching questions about life and death; they also explore the rival and conflicting claims of family, love, law, and the differences that imagination and language make to our conceptions of human life and our place in nature. We will read these two extraordinary writers both separately and in dialogue with one another, and I suspect that we will discover that many of Sophocles' and Shelley's questions are still very much alive.

Besides Shelley and Sophocles, much of our work in August will be centered around the Language and Thinking Anthology, which is a collection of texts that you will receive from your instructor on the first day of the program. This year's Anthology asks the question, "What begins with translation?" Through reading and writing together, we will reimagine the work of translation as a practice that takes many strange and surprising turns: between languages and cultures, but also between genres of art and music, scientific disciplines, political movements, social identities, and even forms of life. The writers in our Anthology (Robin Wall Kimmerer, Charles Darwin, Audre Lorde, Etel Adnan, James Baldwin, Hannah Arendt, and Franz Kafka, among many others) all grapple with translations of various kinds in this larger sense.

To begin in translation requires us to listen to something new: a new voice, a new argument, a new language, a new possibility for life. Throughout our work together in the Language and Thinking Program, we will read actively, experiment with writing in various forms, create and perform new work in collaboration with each other, and think with and listen to each other. We might also write a few ghost stories, as Mary Shelley once did with a couple of friends, with surprising results.

I look forward to meeting all of you in August. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. I can be reached by email at kaufman@bard.edu.

Best wishes,

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