

ENGL 801
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“The Emerging Monster: The Subversive Results of Mary Shelley’s Creativity”

Critical discussion of Mary Shelley’s influences in writing *Frankenstein* is often preoccupied with the similarities between her work and others, especially John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In fact, some scholars argue that her novel is nothing more than a Romantic “retelling” of the epic poem. My paper’s argument stands alongside those scholars who recognize the crucial differences between *Frankenstein* and its sources, and who therefore see Shelley’s novel as actually subverting and critiquing its influences. However, my paper attempts to distinguish itself from others by analyzing Shelley’s subversion from a different and specific approach: the study of creativity. By using Albert Rothenberg’s *The Emerging Goddess* and his theories of creativity as the mirror-image of the dream, the “incept,” and “janusian thinking”, we can see how Shelley used these processes in the creation of her unique novel. The paper will show not only how Shelley created something new, but also how her creative process subverted her source material and what the subversive results are.

The paper tracks the various strands of influences—both written and personal—and separates them into two groups: those that are merely reflected in her work and those that Shelley acted upon and re-conceptualized through the creative process. Rothenberg’s theory of janusian thinking is used to show how the re-imagined sources, especially the Prometheus myth and *Paradise Lost*, subvert and critique their sources. The paper also uses janusian thinking in discussing Shelley’s blending of Gothic and Realism and her subversive results. The paper will also observe how Victor Frankenstein’s creative process mirrors Shelley’s, both therefore demonstrating Rothenberg’s theories. Finally, the paper will suggest that Shelley’s recognition of how the creative process operates challenged popular beliefs, and may have contributed to the incorrect view that her novel is nothing more than a “simple retelling.”

Mary Shelley and the Monster: Students of 19th Century Britain

In approaching Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a number of critics have focused on the education of the Monster and how his education affects his interaction with the world around him. Even within this one approach, there are several directions to pursue. Many critics have viewed the Monster's education in the light of feminism. For example, Alan Richardson proposes that the education of the Monster reflects the restrictive and oppressive education of women in the 19th century. Other critics relate Mary Shelley's work and that of her mother Mary Wollstonecraft in light of feminism as well, intersecting *Frankenstein* with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Still other researchers, such as Nancy Yousef, approach the Monster's education as a criticism of contemporary philosophers of human development, such as Locke. Many scholars have approached this novel with a feminist or philosophical focus, while using historical and biographical information as support for their claims. However, a historical and biographical focus is an enlightening approach in itself to examine the education and acquisition of literacy of the Monster. Specifically, the portrayal of the Monster's acquisition and use of literacy finds its source in the literacy situation of the early 19th century, as well as Mary Shelley's life and education. Many people at the time, including Shelley, educated themselves, and the texts that Shelley studied find their way into this novel. In terms of the historical approach, the Monster disproves some of the literacy myths that were active at the time, such as literacy as a means of social advance and personal improvement. Finally, both Shelley and the Monster were literate and articulate entities in an environment that was not accommodating: the Monster, no matter how well spoken, was shunned by society, and Shelley, although she wrote a full-length novel, was not received well as an independent author.

Death's Concubines: Baudelaire's *Une Charogne* as *Carpe Diem* Seduction Poetry

Vividly revolting, Baudelaire's *Une Charogne* has been disgusting and offending readers since its first publication date. Although some contemporary critics (Humphreys, Raitwéz) believe the poem's shock value is its sole function, most critics believe the poem functions in other ways. Current critical conversations surrounding *Une Charogne* have generally recognized the poem's *carpe diem* structure yet have denied the poem functions as seduction poetry; however I believe a close reading of *Une Charogne*, focusing on the existence of a specific female addressee, the title's double meaning, and the speaker's dramatic interaction with the addressee, reveals that the poem functions as an extension of the *carpe diem* seduction argument presented in lines twenty-six through twenty-nine of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." First, I respond to the few contemporary critics who still insist Baudelaire wrote the poem solely for shock value by pointing out the poem's address to a specific female individual, for the poem's structure as an address to one person is not the ideal structure for a poem intended merely to shock conservative readers. Second, I use the title's double meaning, both "A Carcass" and "A Slut," and the poem's vivid sexual imagery to show that the poem, like other *carpe diem* seduction poems, does concern the addressee's virginity, referred to in the poem's language as her "divine essence." Third, I explore the text as a dramatic exchange between the speaker and addressee where the speaker shapes the poem's rhetorical structure around the addressee's reactions. By studying the interaction of speaker and addressee, I reveal that the poem does level an implicit request for sexual intercourse using imagery of death, an essential trait of the *carpe diem* genre, which closely resembles lines twenty-six through twenty-nine of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Disturbingly, the speaker delivers the poem's implicit request using a cynical tone that hints at rape if the addressee refuses to consent to sexual intercourse while living. Because *Une Charogne* features the common characteristics of the *carpe diem* seduction genre, a female addressee, the speaker's explicit concern with virginity and mortality, dramatic features, and a request, scholars should necessarily place the poem within the *carpe diem* seduction poetry genre.

(361 words)