



HIDEOUS LOVE

—THE STORY OF THE GIRL WHO WROTE *FRANKENSTEIN*—

BY STEPHANIE HEMPHILL

ABOUT THE BOOK

An all-consuming love affair.

A family torn apart by scandal.

A young author on the brink of greatness.

Hideous Love is the fascinating story of gothic novelist Mary Shelley, who as a teen girl fled her restrictive home only to find herself in the shadow of a brilliant but moody boyfriend, famed poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. It is the story of the mastermind behind one of the most iconic figures in all of literature: a monster constructed out of dead bodies and brought to life by the tragic Dr. Frankenstein.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is Mary Shelley? Do you like her as depicted in *Hideous Love*? Why or why not?
2. Mary offers an explanation of why Jane assists with her secret courtship with Shelley (p. 28). What is your own analysis of Jane's motivations?
3. Which of Percy Bysshe Shelley's ideas and beliefs are progressive or radical? How does Mary explore and adopt her husband's ideals? Why is she open to them?
4. How does the mantle of living up to the "standards of [her] birth" affect Mary (p. 106)?
5. What experiences from Mary Shelley's life make their way into *Frankenstein*? Why is that novel published anonymously? Who is Mary trying to please with her writing?
6. Consider "My Love" (p. 54). What does it suggest about Mary and Shelley's relationship? Do you agree or disagree with its description of love? What does love do for you?
7. How does Mary love Shelley? In turn, how does Shelley love Mary? Why is it significant to Mary that Percy "worships the best part of [her]" (p. 22)?
8. How does Mary rationalize her husband's free love beliefs and indiscretions? What about Mary and Shelley's love might be "hideous"?
9. How is Lord Byron destructive to those around him? Why does he get away with his behavior?
10. How do money troubles and scandal plague the Shelleys throughout their life together? How do they overcome—or at least endure—these problems?
11. Describe Mary and Claire's relationship. What about it is typical, and what is atypical? How does Shelley bring them together? How does he keep them apart?
12. How do Mary's and Claire's experiences as unwed pregnant teenagers compare with those of today's young women? What has changed for teen mothers?
13. How do the deaths of her children, mother, and stepsister Fanny affect Mary? What other things does Mary lose in the novel? What things does she gain?
14. What about the care of children in the novel is unusual or surprising? What factors might have led to such treatment?
15. What does "My Fair Hand" (p. 264) suggest about how Mary views her roles as a writer, thinker, and mother? How can you relate?
16. How is Mary more dedicated to her husband and his talents than her own? Why is she this way?
17. What does freedom mean to Mary? How does her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, influence Mary's ideas about freedom? Does Mary achieve the freedom she seeks?
18. How does the book's verse format contribute to the relaying of Mary Shelley's story? Do you enjoy stories in verse? Why or why not?
19. How does a young woman's experience from two hundred years ago resonate with you today? What about Mary Shelley's story is timeless and representative of the larger female experience?

