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# Hideous Love: The Story Of The Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein



## Synopsis

From Stephanie Hemphill, author of the Printz Honor winner *Your Own, Sylvia* and the acclaimed novel *Wicked Girls: A Novel of the Salem Witch Trials*, comes the fascinating story of gothic novelist Mary Shelley, most famous for the classic *Frankenstein*. An all-consuming love affair with famed poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, a family torn apart by scandal, a young author on the brink of greatness: *Hideous Love* 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. This luminous verse novel reveals how Mary Shelley became one of the most celebrated authors in history.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Balzer + Bray (October 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0061853313

ISBN-13: 978-0061853319

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.9 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #592,343 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in [Books > Teens >](#)

[Historical Fiction > Biographical > European](#) #619 in [Books > Teens > Romance > Historical](#)

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 8 Up—Hemphill's ability to plumb the depths of an author's pain and despair is evident in this examination of the life of Mary Shelley, best known as the author of *Frankenstein* and wife of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. This present-tense novel in verse provides an intimate glimpse into Mary's life. In addition to pondering questions of life and death, Hemphill explores morality, fidelity, creation, and pain. Mary's personal life reads like a soap opera. At age 16, she meets Percy and months later they elope, abandoning his pregnant wife, Harriet. The couple lives throughout Europe and, following Harriet's suicide, eventually marry. Mary's life is filled with emotionally scarring events, including the deaths of her mother, sister, and children, which she feels "like a thousand knives/have been thrust upon me." She also struggles with Percy's flirtations with her stepsister and with her complicated relationship with Lord Byron. Her

tempestuous life becomes a catalyst for her writing. “My protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, builds his creature of graveyard parts before he sets out to animate it through science. I construct my characters beginning with people I know and then add or rearrange other aspects of personality to fit my plot.” Readers will identify the parallels between the creation of a monster and the creation of her famous book. Barbara M. Moon, Suffolk Cooperative Library System, Bellport, NY (c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

Few stories-behind-the-story get retold as much as the writing of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, but the ever-reliable free-verse poet Hemphill, author of the Printz Honor Book *Your Own, Sylvia* (2007), manages to plumb from it her own vein of riches. For starters, Hemphill does not obsess upon the novel, instead letting it rest as a distant metaphor. Instead, she tracks Mary’s young life and a tumultuous life it is, as she suffers multiple dead children, affairs, suicides, and deaths. First and foremost, this is a chronicle of Mary’s stormy long affair with the married poet Percy Shelley as they, often with the infamous Lord Byron and Mary’s jealous stepsister Claire in tow, outrun scandal across Europe. The girlish accessibility of the prose subtly transforms to something darker and more mature, with Hemphill’s restraint her finest quality, whether speaking about art or sex or death: “We both know / that sorrow cannot be measured / by the size of a little one’s shoe.” This is, as intended, an ideal companion piece for teens studying the original classic. Grades 7-12. --Daniel Kraus

This is the story of Mary Shelley. A young girl who fell for Percy Shelley when they connected intellectually and took off to travel together. Tagging along with them is Mary’s half-sister Claire. Mary wishes to be rid of her, but Percy enjoys her company. Mary learns a lot while with Percy, but she also suffers a great deal as a result of their couple-ship. This is her story, not a happy tale at all. This book will probably only hold you until the end if you are curious about Mary’s life. This book is quite slow going and honestly not entirely worth it to keep going if you are not fascinated in some way. This story was definitely much easier to breeze through than a biography would be, but this is a work of fiction. I enjoyed getting to learn a bit more about Mary Shelley and all of her losses. She had a lot of tragedy surround her, much more than most people now at her age. There’s not really much to say about this story beyond that though. It was an okay read but I much preferred the author’s novel *Wicked Girls*. First Line: “I want to be beauty, but I am not.” Favorite Line: “our wily

messenger pigeon,"

So, I liked this. Did I think it was great poetry.....Not particularly. But overall I liked the story telling and unlike some of the other reviewers (who have valid points) I was still engaged when the story meandered into more mundane aspects of her life. I honestly had never thought that much about the author of Frankenstein before. And it was interesting to read a story about her life. I learned a lot I hadn't known about the Mary and it did intrigue me enough to google some aspects of the book. I'm a little startled that I liked this book so much when there were so many negative reviews (most focused on the whole not truly poetry debate). I'm not a huge poetry fan. Which may be why I liked it. Because it didn't read like poetry. Example: "I know all too well the horror that it is to lose one's sibling and one's child. One may become mad at the world and the injustice of it all, rage with fists and fury. But eventually you must face your own contribution to their sad ends." "We both know that sorrow cannot be measured by the size of a little one's shoe. A part of you buries under the earth never to be retrieved, a sound without an echo." Anyhow, poetry fans read at your own risk. And folks who are just interested in a fictionalized telling of Mary Shelley this was a very accessible book. At least in my opinion.

Something you need to know going into this book - it is written in verse. I know some people have very strong opinions about verse one way or the other. I don't happen to be one of those people; I could take it or leave it. So Hideous Love is the story of Mary Shelley from the time she met her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley until his death. We went from teenaged mistress, to wife to widow in under ten years. Mary tells her tale to the reader through a series of poems and verses and I thought Hemphill managed to convey an awful lot of emotion and detail in a small space. Mary had a really wacky life - her family and then marriage was full of strange couplings, cuckholding and vagabondry. Not knowing anything about her personal life, I found this fascinating. The writing of Frankenstein is discussed but is not the only thing she writes in this time period. The story more focuses on the nutso relationships that happen between Mary and the people around her. It is also a portrayal of the transient artist lifestyle that many other famous authors and poets liked. I have read a couple of other books about Fitzgerald and Hemingway and they lived similarly, so it was interesting to see that a hundred years prior they did it too. I liked reading about Mary and who she was as a person, but I would have liked more. She was super-focused on Shelley and her relationship with him, but was clearly experiencing some very strong emotions regarding him, his relationship with other women (her stepsister!), and her role as a mother, which sadly was an awful,

heart-breaking roller coaster ride. It seemed obvious to me that the writing of Frankenstein - about a monster pieced together with basically leftovers of others - was a mirror of how she felt about herself. She could easily have been both the monster and Victor, who created him. I think Hemphill's decision to speak more to Mary's almost=obsession with Shelley and less on her feelings about herself was probably calculated, as Mary was a teenager when this started, but I still wanted more balance. It did drag a bit towards the end because of this focus. I enjoyed this; it was a very fast read because of the verse. But, I would have much preferred traditional prose as the vehicle to share Mary's story. I think it would have given me what I was missing. I think fans of historical fiction will enjoy this and anyone who liked reading Frankenstein in school. A teacher could easily pair this with reading the text in class for anyone looking for something supplemental. 3.5/5

This was another book that I was skeptical to get in to, due to some negative reviews. But once again I was eager to give it a shot and was glad that I did. This was only the second book that I have read that is written in verse. I have to admit that at first it was hard for me to get into the story as I was adapting to the writing style, but once I got through the first 50 pages or so. But once the story took off, I have to admit I was hooked. I don't think that this book could have had a better title, because there is no way to describe this beautifully gothic story, but to call it "Hideous Love." Everything about the love story behind Mary and Shelley is absolutely heart breaking. From how they met, to the lengths they had to go to be together, to their married life, up to the end. Yes, it does mention how Mary came up with the idea of Frankenstein, and the what she had to overcome to get the story published, but what really registered with me was the love story and all the emotions I felt while reading this story.

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