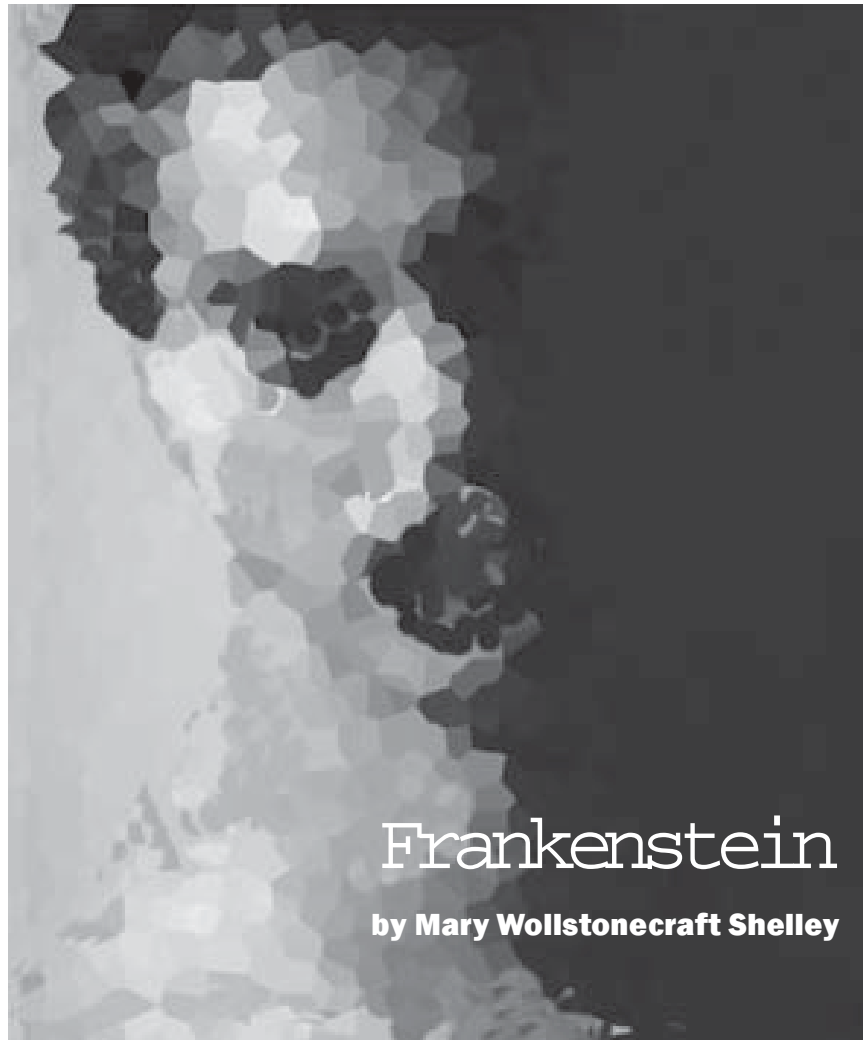


# APPR 2003 Themes

for use in Discussion Groups,  
Curriculum Guide, and Writing Project.



Frankenstein

by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

## WHAT IS A MONSTER?

*In the volumes of criticism written about Frankenstein since it was first published, the monster has been equated to many social and cultural phenomena. Discuss the following correlations and their implications in the context of the novel and our world.*

**Monster = Industrial Revolution**

**Monster = the French Mob**

**Monster = Atom Bomb**

**Monster = Age of Computers**

**Monster = Dictatorships or Totalitarian Regimes**

**Monster = Mass Media**

**Monster = ?**

## IT'S ALIVE... and well in Hollywood

**Courtesy of Murray Ross, Artistic Director  
TheatreWorks of Colorado Springs**

Most people know more about Hollywood's version of the monster Frankenstein than they do about the creature from the novel. How has the monster changed in the retelling of Mary Shelley's tale?

Mary Shelley excludes virtually all comedy from her monstrous, tragic story, yet each time we retell the story we tend to smile or laugh. Why does the tale both prohibit and invite humor?

How do the numerous retellings of the classic novel disclose and distort its essential character?

# RESPONSIBILITY: Exercising conscience and accountability to self and society.

## THE RESPONSIBLE CREATOR

“So much has been done ... more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.”

—Victor Frankenstein

- I. **Did Dr. Frankenstein feel a responsibility to foster his creation?**
  - A. Why or why not?
  - B. At what point did he determine that his responsibility was to eliminate his creation? Were his reasons valid?
- II. **Is genetic engineering natural or unnatural?** Organ transplantation (harvesting, animal to human)? Mechanization and robotics?
  - A. What are the moral questions these sciences raise about responsibility and scientific creation?
  - B. How do they affect our quality of life?
- III. **Is cloning the equivalent of creating?** Does the existence of the science give humans the ability to bestow life?
  - A. If so, does the act of cloning a human create a soul?
  - B. What is the responsibility of the creator: to society, to the creation, to the scientific process?
  - C. Does cloning cross the line between science and alchemy? Evolution and divinity?
- IV. **Will science ever discover a “cure” for death?**
  - A. What would the consequences of such a discovery be?
  - B. What new moral and ethical dilemmas would emerge from the potential of immortality?
  - C. How would quality of life be affected?
- V. **Should boundaries be applied to freedom of expression and one’s right to create?**
  - A. When should creative impulse be checked based on possible consequences or implications, and by whom? Do we have laws and social codes that do this? How do our personal codes vary?
  - B. Does society determine the boundaries and the value of artistic creation? Think about graffiti, rap music, nudity in art, etc.

## THE RESPONSIBLE BEING

“All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!”

—*The creature*

- I. **What does *Frankenstein* say about our personal responsibility:**
  - A. to society?
  - B. to the future?
  - C. in our inter-personal relationships?
- II. **How are monsters defined, and by whom?**
  - A. Is the creature in Shelley’s text a monster or noble savage; is it a maligned and misunderstood innocent or an innately evil being?
  - B. Are there human monsters in our society? Who defines them and what is our responsibility to them?
- III. **What is the role of knowledge in determining personal responsibility?**
  - A. Dr. Frankenstein uses his knowledge to reach beyond common scientific and social boundaries. In our society, what are current examples of this?
  - B. In the mythical story of Prometheus, knowledge is portrayed as a “dangerous gift.” How does this manifest itself in Shelley’s text? What is the responsibility of the bearer of knowledge in this context?
  - C. How has access to knowledge changed in our society? Is there knowledge that is kept from the general population? If so, by whom? What about in other cultures? What is the effect of a greater access to information on our public and private interactions?
- IV. **How is parental responsibility portrayed in the book?**
  - A. What does the text say about the responsibility of society in raising a child? What is the modern role of social institutions in child rearing? Think about the changing role of public schools and religious institutions, recent changes to legislation, etc.
  - B. Have changes to traditional family structure affected parental responsibility? Are there different expectations in single-parent families? In families where both parents work outside the home?
  - C. The topics of death and abandonment are prevalent in the book. How do these issues affect the natural development of the creature? How do these issues translate to current concerns such as attachment disorder and blended family development?