

**Topic: Frankenstein**

**Course Title: Form/ Narrative style**

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## ***Frankenstein* : Form /Narrative style**

1. Mary Shelley's ***Frankenstein*** can be read as an epistolary novel. The term epistolary comes from the Greek word "***epistole***" which means letter. So epistolary novel as a genre refers to all literary creations written in the form of letters, journals, diaries, newspaper cutting etc. This form of novel writing gained currency in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Notable novelists who popularized this literary form in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smolett to name a few.

2. The epistolary form relies on a principal narrator, and the novel is presented through this narrator's eyes. Consequently, this form has certain advantages as well as disadvantages. While readers often get a first hand account of incidents, there always remains the possibility of a **“bias” or lack of objectivity.**
3. Mary Shelley complicates the form further by building layers of narratives in *Frankenstein*. There are three narrators in the novel : Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature. But one cannot miss the fact that it is Robert Walton who controls the entire narrative because it is he who **writes or notes down the narrations of**

## **Victor Frankenstein and the Creature.**

So ultimately, readers get to read the mind of Robert Walton through his letters and wonder how much of it is reliable.

- 4. Narrators and Points of view:** There are three narrators who bring in their perspectives in *Frankenstein*. The primary narrator is Robert Walton, who begins and ends the novel, through letters addressed to his sister. He introduces Victor Frankenstein and goes on to record Victor's dying statements. The second narrator is Victor Frankenstein, who gives us his perspective of Robert Walton and the Creature. Furthermore, his letters form the main body of the novel in

which he traces his journey from childhood to the present time. Victor Frankenstein also provides the first break into the mind of the Creature. The third narrator in the novel is the Creature. He breaks in at the end, disrupting Robert Walton's narrative and for the first time readers get a first hand knowledge of the Creature. Of course, one should not forget that the Creature's final words to Walton are also handed down to us in Robert Walton's letter. The readers encounter these three points of view / perspectives but all of them are finally handed down by Robert Walton.

5. **How reliable is the narrator?** Since the novel relies on the confessional style

so intrinsic to the epistolary form, readers find it comforting to believe each narrator in the novel. There is no authorial intervention or instances of narrators interrupting other narratives. Mary Shelley ensures that her readers take each narrator on their face value while negotiating the proverbial dire straits as each narrator moves back and forth in the novel.