Metadiagnostic Narrative Structure of *Frankenstein*

**Epistolary Novel:** A novel told in letters (epistles). The genre appears in the 1730s and achieves its greatest force in the hands of Samuel Richardson whose *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747) take the English-speaking world by storm. The success of Walter Scott with his historical novel *Waverley* in 1813, and the publication of Jane Austen's novels after 1811, -- novels which were first written in the epistolary form -- signals the invention of a sophisticated, impersonal mode of novelistic narration which will thereafter dominate fictional production. The epistolary genre also increases verisimilitude (from Latin *verus* true + *similitudo* similitude), the state or quality of something which exhibits the appearance of truth or reality, and denotes the extent to which a work of fiction exhibits realism or authenticity, or otherwise conforms to our sense of reality, because we get different narrators without having to resort to the difficult-to-believe omniscient narrator.

**Bildungsroman:** a novel of self-development, the story of a single individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order. The growth process, at its roots a quest story, has been described as both "an apprenticeship to life" and a "search for meaningful existence within society." To spur the hero or heroine on to their journey, some form of loss or discontent must jar them at an early stage away from the home or family setting. The process of maturity is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order. Eventually, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in the protagonist, who is then accommodated into society. The novel ends with an assessment by the protagonist of himself and his new place in that society. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, is the prototypical Bildungsroman.

**Romantic Novel:** The novel tends to subvert, if not to reject literary conventions; often a novel defies genre (*Frankenstein* is Epistolary, Bildungsroman, etc). Realism in presenting landscape and life and the historical precision of season, dates, and hours co-exist with the dreamlike and the unhistorical; the author refuses to be confined by conventional classifications. The protagonists' wanderings are motivated by flight from previously-chosen goals, so that often there is a pattern of escape and pursuit. The protagonists are driven by irresistible passion–lust, curiosity, ambition, intellectual pride, envy. The emphasis is on their desire for transcendence, to overcome the limitations of the body, of society, of time rather than their moral transgressions. They yearn to escape the limitations inherent to truth and may find that the only escape is death. Death is not only a literal happening or plot device, but also and primarily a psychological concern. For the protagonists, death originates in the imagination, becomes a "tendency of mind," and may develop into an obsession. As in Gothic fiction, the supernatural, wild nature, dream and madness, physical violence, and perverse sexuality are set off against social conventions and institutions. Endings are disquieting and unsatisfactory because the writer resists a definitive conclusion, which accounts for all loose ends and explains away any ambiguities or uncertainties. The imagination is unleashed to explore extreme states of being and experiences; the love of nature is not presented just in its tranquil and smiling aspects but also appears in its wild, stormy moods; nature is a living, vitalizing force and offers a refuge from the constraints of civilization; so great a focus is placed on the individual that society is pushed to the periphery of

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2 Marianne Hirsch in "The Novel of Formation as Genre"
the action and the reader’s consciousness; the concern with identity and the creation of the self are a primary concern; childhood and the adult’s developing from childhood experiences are presented realistically; hero is rebellious, passionate, misanthropic, isolated, and wilful, have mysterious origins, lack family ties, reject external restrictions and control, and seek to resolve their isolation by fusing with a love object; the noble savage; experiments with the narrative structure; the supernatural or the possibility of the supernatural appears repeatedly.\(^3\)

**Gothic Novel:** type of romantic fiction that predominated in English literature in the last third of the 18th century and the first two decades of the 19th century, the setting for which was usually a ruined Gothic castle or abbey. The Gothic novel, or Gothic romance, emphasized mystery and horror and was filled with ghost-haunted rooms, underground passages, and secret stairways. One of the principal writers of the English Gothic romance was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, who wrote *Frankenstein* (1818). The genre was one phase of the literary movement of romanticism in English literature and was also the forerunner of the modern mystery novel. Later American writers who used Gothic elements in their fiction include Henry James, William Faulkner, and Flannery O’Connor. The term Gothic is also used to designate narrative prose or poetry of which the principal elements are violence, horror, and the supernatural.

**Victorian Novel:** For good historical reasons, Victorian novels tended to be very long. (Great Expectations and Jane Eyre, believe it or not, are not that long by the standards of their day.) Victorian novels are plot-heavy; they usually involve installments, or volumes, which could almost stand alone. Each installment is opened and closed, plot lines are advanced or deferred, but there are also important relationships among the various plot lines. Characters and events in one plot line often clarify how we are to interpret characters and events in another plot line. The names of characters and places were not chosen casually; usually they hold significance. Settings—whether rural or urban, interior or exterior— influence mood, help us to interpret their inhabitants' and/or their describers' personalities, and signal the direction of the plot. Victorian novels are rife with allusions of all sorts: to other works of literature, to artists and works of art, to music, to mythology, to the Bible, to historical events and figures, to contemporary social and political events. These, too, are not casual references. Images and figurative language are repeated, particularly in what seem to be important places. Themes are central and repeated, often represented by symbols, such as fires, which are usually associated in literature with passion and rebellion, and can often communicate a theme. Victorian novelists did not employ a simple concept of an omniscient, third-person narrator. Watch for development in the narrator, and in all the characters, especially whether they are static and fixed, or dynamic. Victorian novels are frequently about upper-middle-class men, yet behind and around these men are women, workers and servants, and an empire on which the sun never set. Be aware, then, of what women do and say (and don’t do and don’t say), of the roles they are encouraged to play and the penalties exacted if they don’t play them. Take note of how characters earn their money, what social class they are members of, and who and why they marry (all of which items are usually described, however briefly, with great precision). Pay attention to characters who disappear to and re-appear from exotic places and how those experiences change them.\(^4\)


\(^4\) [http://www.umdl.umn.edu/casl/lum-eng/classes/434/howtoread.html](http://www.umdl.umn.edu/casl/lum-eng/classes/434/howtoread.html)