

Consider the use of
first person narrative
in frankenstein



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Frankenstein makes liberal use of first person narrative to verbally illustrate the text in a number of ways. Through doing this, it aims to show a hidden depth to the inner workings of the mind of the narrator, it can make a scene more dramatic, it can allow the reader to more fully relate with the events of the text, or it can just be to make it have a more surreal effect on the reader if there is something unusual about the narrator. Certainly in Dracula, the other Gothic text I have chosen to analyse, is this the case.

Both Frankenstein and Dracula use this technique although obviously in different ways, and because both texts can be considered similar to each other in a number of ways, it can be difficult to fully recognise the differences between the uses of this technique and indeed the reasons for these variations. The first, primary difference is the different tenses in which the first person narrative feature is used.

Dracula is more likely to include a phrase such as ' I ventured... or ' I heard' both of which are in the past tense, whereas in Frankenstein, due to the text not being written up as many documents to give evidence (actually more like a narrative prose) phrases such as ' I can' or ' I do' when coming from Walton. Of course, when it is Walton relaying what the creature has said, or what Victor Frankenstein has said, naturally it must be in the past tense, but the fact that when he thinks to himself it is in the present tense gives it more of a sense of immediacy, increasing both the tension and the reader's awareness of what is happening.

In both the texts, it is never just one character who has the first person narrative like it is in other texts, such as ' The Raven': ' this I heard... ', but

always a mixture; whether or not it increases the Gothic effect by allowing the reader to access the most inner of sanctums, the narrator's soul, is to be debated, but nevertheless it does have a strong effect upon the reader, who can sense that they are being allowed access into something most precious, and should therefore be afforded with the greatest of attention.

When Victor describes the creation of the creature in first person narrative, it perfectly expresses what his disposition was like at that time; "I could not tear my thoughts from my employment". The usage of the word 'tear' actually shows that even with physical exertion, it was still impossible to do anything but complete his creation. He can be seen to be concentrating like a mother on what happens ahead of pregnancy, and even gets the sort of emotional detachment that is common in mothers with 'postnatal depression'.

There can be a comparison made here with Mina's perception of Lucy's night walking, because through Lucy's later first person narration, you can tell that without her knowing, she must obey these urges given to her by Dracula. In a way this is more frightening than the use in Frankenstein, because at least Victor knows to some extent what he is doing, and on some level does indeed want these, whereas Lucy is blissfully unaware and terribly enough this even leads to her demise.

The inner workings of Victor's mind are indeed exposed because although he recognises the ill effects on his health of his obsession, 'my cheek had grown pale with study', he continued to remain working obsessively in isolation, cut off from anyone, even ordinary contact with the living, with '

unremitting ardour'. This description gives us a small glance into the turmoil that must be going on inside his head, and would be comparable in Dracula to the inner thoughts of the Count himself.

The inner thoughts of the characters are wanted enough that in a way first person narrative would be exceedingly useful throughout the novel, although it is not used solely for that purpose, but also to provide a greater sense of drama and tension. The fear and emotion in Victor's mind, not merely his voice, can be detected not just by the direct statement of the emotion that he is feeling, but also by roundabout ways of describing something. When someone is afraid, they don't speak concisely, but will over-elaborate, go into greater detail than needed, and more often than not go off on a complete tangent.

The dream that Victor experiences about Elizabeth can be seen in some way as a tangent, because it is not directly related to the creature that he has created, but instead is just something rather disturbing, that we would not be able to know about unless Victor had stated directly like he does in the book. It shows that it wasn't directly the creature that frightened him, because otherwise he would have been unable to sleep. He describes the nightmare in a way that is typical of Gothic horror, where the fear is not just implied although still suspenseful.

The fact that it includes something of an Oedipal complex allows us to see that Victor is not as ordinary as he would have us to believe, and we would have remained unaware of this had it not been in first person. This dream can be compared with Jonathan's description of lying awake in bed, hearing

things all around him, when he writes about it later, because by it being written in this way, it allows the action to become that much more immediate, and lets the events affect the reader more strongly.

The fact that Dracula is written as a collection of documents written and assembled by a variety of people (although not Van Helsing) lets it not only feel more realistic to read, but also lets it feel more surreal to read because it is about events that could never occur in a logical mind in a logical world, but yet it is written as if it did really happen. This disturbs the reader more than an ordinary novel could, because now the reader can put themselves in the shoes of the characters in the novel, and witness the events first hand as it were.

Therefore when we read about the insanity of Renfield as told by Seward, because Seward bore witness to this at first hand, and saw him 'devouring flies', it allows us to notice how disturbing it really is to meet someone so insane. It is similar to when Lucy writes first hand after having been bitten by Dracula, and writes about the gaps in her memories, and how kind everyone is. This is because to read about events from the perspective of someone whose mind is not normal, but instead when there is something else, something dark deep down, it can be very revealing and shocking to read about.

In the final scenes of both Frankenstein and Dracula, the respective authors succeed in making it much more dramatic than it would have been otherwise by using first person narrative, because then everything is described in less floral language, and instead simply using ordinary words that would have

either cropped up in day to day conversation, or using whatever came to mind when the event happened. Overall, in Frankenstein and Dracula, first person narrative sets out to achieve a number of objectives, and I feel succeeds in these.

Through this technique, it becomes much more dramatic by letting the sentences become more concise, it gives us a hidden view to the mind of the characters, and allows the reader to become more directly involved with the events of these novels. Although this technique cannot and should not be used all the time, when used in the right ways, it can help with making the novels more enjoyable to read and makes them seem to be better works of literature in general.