

How successfully do
Walton's letters
introduce the essay



How successfully do Walton's letters introduce the central themes and concerns of the novel "Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley? Walton is a sailor looking for a paradise. He believes that it exists on the north pole, even though most people would strongly disagree with this hypothesis. There are many similarities between his character and that of Victor Frankenstein, helping introduce the central themes and concerns to the novel. Walton's letters to his sister are the frame of the story. Even the main part of the story is written by Walton and sent to his sister.

The first letter is written in December and is sent from St. Petersburg. Here, we find out about Walton's journey and goal. Walton describes the paradise that he imagines to be on the north pole "the region of beauty and delight. (...) the sun is for ever visible". A place like this is one where many people would be grateful to be in, so if Walton does find it, he will be glorious and famous. The journey can also be interpreted as a metaphor for both Frankenstein's and Walton's ambitions.

They start out with their families, in a safe place, but their over-ambitiousness leads to deaths of people they need. This makes us question where this journey leads, especially since it's set in such wild and inhospitable locations. Walton, similarly to Frankenstein, describes the scenery in huge detail, which is typical of a Gothic novel. The wild landscapes could be representing Frankenstein's or Walton's states of mind; the geological frontiers symbolising their inability to realise where ethical frontiers stand.

Both Frankenstein and Walton refuse to live a normal and calm life and decide to go on adventures for knowledge. Neither of them can see reason and they prefer glory and fame to wealth. They pursue science and exploration to benefit mankind, but also for personal glory. A question the readers often ask is whether they have good motifs, or whether their ambitions are driving them crazy. Walton's language reflects on his passion and warm-heartedness. He writes " I feel my heart glow with an enthusiasm which elevates me to heaven". His use of metaphors makes him seem educated and noble.

Right from the beginning, it is clear that his sister is against this expedition, so like Frankenstein, he is going against his family's will. Both of them are also chasing impossible dreams. Walton wants to find a non-existing paradise on the north pole, and Frankenstein wants to play God and defeat death. What neither of them realise is that with such high levels of commitment, they can be left all alone, without any friends or family, because of spending their entire time working on their projects rather than spending time with their loved ones.

Throughout the first letter, Walton's ideas usually flow, but sometimes he contradicts himself, showing that his state of mind is a bit uneven. The first letter is finished by Walton his sister his plans for the near future and telling her he loves her by signing it with the words " Your affectionate brother". This letter introduces to us the motif of family relations, between brother and sister. The main difference between the relations of Walton and Frankenstein and their sisters is that Walton's sister is married, so they will never be joined in union, unlike Victor and Elizabeth.

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This letter also introduces the theme of over-ambition, and it leading to loss of loved ones, and not necessarily glory and fame. The next letter is sent in March the following year, from Archangel. In this letter, Walton moans to his sister that on the boat he has no friends. He directly tells her " I have no friend, Margaret". This is different to Frankenstein, because when he travelled to England, for example, he took his dear friend, Clerval. The monster, also, is in need of a friend, but no one will look past his looks to be one of his friends, or to help him get one.

Walton wants a friendly companion to have a stabilising influence. In this letter, he also tells his sister that the weather conditions are bad " encompassed as I am by frost and snow", making the reader realise that the chance of there being a paradise on the north pole is very small, suggesting that this whole voyage is absurd. In this letter, Walton's sister is told some stories of crew members, especially that of the master. When writing his story, Walton speaks in such a a positive and admiring manner about the master, that makes us realise what a romantic he is.

This, alongside him writing to his sister instead of another woman, suggests that possibly, besides his family and travelling, he never fell in love and potentially, this could be due to his overambitious nature and spending a long time planning this expedition instead of meeting new people. The master in Walton's words is described as completely selfless and over the top nice. He embodies goodness. It is typical of a Gothic novel to have characters embodying distinctive characteristics. This letter also includes a quote from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ' The Rime of the Ancyent Mariner'; " the land of mist and snow".

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Coleridge is known to be one of the greatest romantic poets of all time. This letter introduces the theme of loneliness. It shows that everyone who is lonely goes mad, but also everyone who is mad, becomes lonely. This reflects on Victor's madness making him lose everyone who he has loved, but also the creature's inability to make friends, because of the way he looks, makes him mad and so he starts murdering innocent people. It also reinforces the theme of chasing impossible dreams, and their inevitable consequences. The third letter is written in July, and the location is unknown.

This suggests that not everything is going according to Walton's plan. Walton starts by saying that he is safe, although the vessel is endangered by the poor weather conditions. This natural border of weather can also be perceived as a metaphor for ethical borders. If Walton is passing the natural borders of weather conditions and ice, will Frankenstein be just as determined to pass the ethical border and pretend to be God, by defeating death and creating life? In this letter, Walton is highly motivated to complete his expedition and once again fails to see why this journey is a dangerous idea.

This letter is ended very romantically, " Heaven bless my beloved sister! ", reinforcing the idea of Walton being a romantic. This letter acquaints the reader with the idea of crossing boundaries, both physically and metaphorically, and, similarly to the other letters, Walton's, and hence Frankenstein's, ambition is presented with negative connotations. The fourth, and last letter of the opening, is written in August, and correspondingly to the third, the location is unknown. Walton starts out by building up the tension.

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This is done by him telling his sister that a strange incident occurred, without directly saying what it was. The first sentence of this letter is " So strange an incident has happened to us that I cannot forbear recording it". The fact that Walton's vessel is stuck in ice at this point, can be interpreted metaphorically. It could be a symbol for being trapped in your own ambition, just like Victor was, and Walton is endangered of becoming. Walton's madness in his pursuit traps him, just like the ice traps his vessel.

The way Walton describes the strange occurrence prepares us for the fantastical nature of the tale that Victor will later be telling us. The description of the uncommon scenery helps us accept the extraordinary story that we are told. The first citing of the monster occurs, and he is described to have manly shapes, " but apparently of gigantic stature" so he is far too big to be a human. This makes Walton, and other men on the boat wonder whether he is a large man, a ghost, or a mythical creature. When Frankenstein is spotted for the first time, he seems a lot more human-like and civilised relatively to the monster. He was not as the other traveller seemed to be" Walton wrote to his sister. In comparison to Victor, the creature seems like a barbarian, presenting his destructive nature. Walton describes Frankenstein as barely alive, civilised, and European. He speaks fluent English, but with a foreign accent. We find out that there are two sides to Victor; there is a benevolence and sweetness to him, but his eyes are wild and mad. We find out that Frankenstein has been through a lot, and he wishes Walton not to reach the same level of ambition as he did.

Driven with the need of a friend, Walton cares about Frankenstein and wonders what it is that drove him to this state of madness. Walton seems

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very eager to help Frankenstein get better, so similarly to Frankenstein, he wants to stop death. He “ wrapped him up in blankets and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen stove. ” Walton is clearly doing all that is in his power to save him. The reader can wonder whether it is Victor's eloquence that attracts Walton, but then he may realise that, despite his appearance, the monster is also eloquent, which would potentially attract Walton to him.

In terms of their ambitions, Walton and Frankenstein are similarly described, except Frankenstein is further down the line, meaning he has lost loved ones, and all he now cares about is destroying what he was once so eager to create. They both have zeal, they are too passionate. Victor worries about his new friend when he sees his ambition, and is scared that he will become him, a slave of his own passion. They are both keen to find out more about the other, creating a friendship between them. When Frankenstein tells Walton that he used to have a very noble friend, the idea that the ending will not be happy, is suggested.

In this letter, the importance of friendship is once again presented. If it wasn't for Walton's care towards Victor, he possibly could have frozen to death. We once again find out that being too ambitious is not good, and that this is what lead to Frankenstein chasing a supernatural creature in the middle of nowhere. Walton's letter at the beginning of the novel introduce several of the main themes and concerns of the novel. Firstly, family relations. Walton's relations with his sister can be compared to Victor and Elizabeth.

A frequent question asked is when do a brother and sister love each other too much? A concern that the letters acquaint the reader with is that being overambitious can lead to losing those for whom you care most about and often what you achieve is not what you expected and hoped for. If he does not retreat, Walton's actions will clearly lead to something bad. This is foreshadowed by what happens to Frankenstein. Another major theme introduced is that of loneliness and how it changes people. Walton is a sad person until he stumbles upon Frankenstein, immediately considering him a friend.

Crossing boundaries is another motif recurring in the novel, and it too is presented in Walton's letters, both the physical boundaries and metaphorical ones are presented. The time taken from the first letter sent, to the last one at the end of the novel is 9 months. Ironically that is the time taken for a foetus to develop in its mother's womb. Birth is a very important concern discussed in the novel, starting with Frankenstein's mother dying whilst giving birth to Victor's younger brother to Frankenstein giving life to a creature. Overall, Walton's letters successfully introduce the main ideas of the novel.