



## ROBERT WALTON

### WALTON'S ROLE IN THE NOVEL

Walton is an ambitious man, an explorer of twenty-eight who writes a series of letters to his sister, Margaret, about his journey towards the North Pole. During the novel:

- He is depicted as a **Romantic** man whose imagination and sense of adventure lead him into danger.
- He saves Victor and hears his story.
- He likes and admires Victor immediately and begins to 'love him as a brother' (p. 28).
- His need to succeed on his voyage blinds him to his crew's threat of mutiny.
- He sees the monster for himself and speaks to him at the very end of the novel.

### WALTON'S IMPORTANCE TO THE NOVEL AS A WHOLE

Walton is the **narrator** who begins the novel and his concerns set up the main themes and issues. Not only does Walton begin and end the main tale, but Victor Frankenstein is first seen through his eyes and Walton is Victor's audience as his own story unfolds. Shelley draws several important parallels between Walton and Victor.

#### TOP TIP

A02

There is little physical description of Walton. This means you will need to focus on his emotional qualities, mental characteristics and the way he tells his story – his voice.



### EXAM FOCUS: WRITING ABOUT WALTON

A01



Key point	Evidence / Further meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walton is emotionally volatile and unpredictable, a man who is often at the mercy of his feelings rather than being in control of them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He describes his emotions as he departs on his expedition as a 'trembling sensation, half pleasurable and half fearful' (p. 21).</li> <li>• He finishes one letter to his sister 'My swelling heart involuntarily pours itself out thus' (p. 24).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poems, books and childish fantasies first inspired his desire for exploration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In his early years, he read accounts of seafaring voyages and poetry (p. 16).</li> <li>• He also wrote poetry and dreamed of becoming a famous poet (p. 16).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His letters tend to alternate between hope and gloom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the beginning of the novel, he writes passionately and joyfully about how he imagines the North Pole (p. 15).</li> <li>• This contrasts with his claim that his 'spirits are often depressed' (p. 17).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is a determined character.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He tells his sister that his 'resolutions' are 'as fixed as fate' (p. 21).</li> <li>• At the end of the novel, he says that 'I had rather die than return shamefully' (p. 218), though eventually he has to relent and agrees to return home.</li> </ul>

### TOP TIP: COMPARING WALTON AND VICTOR

A01

You should consider how Shelley draws parallels between Walton and Victor throughout the novel; the two characters resemble each other in their loneliness and desire for friendship, their curiosity and self-education and the force of their ambition. Walton's prayers for a friend to regulate his mind seem to be answered in Victor, who is worried that Walton is pursuing the same course as he did in the past: Victor does not want Walton's desire for knowledge to be a 'serpent to sting' him (p. 31). Walton, therefore, appears to be presented with an image of his potential future self: a man wrecked and destroyed by his own ambition.

Both characters fail to realise the effect their actions can have on others. Walton's resistance to the idea of turning back for home mirrors the relationship between Victor and the monster. The crew becomes the rebellious monster of Walton's creation that stands up for its own rights. It is **ironic** that both Walton and Victor feel themselves to be victims, yet both seem at least partially aware that their own 'mad schemes' (p. 215) are also to blame for their misfortunes.

### KEY CONTEXT

A03

Walton hopes to discover 'a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite' (p. 16). Such a route had been sought by explorers for centuries and Shelley seems to be suggesting here that the young and inexperienced Walton has set himself an unrealistic goal. The Northwest Passage was finally navigated by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen between 1903 and 1906.

## RESPONDING TO WRITERS' EFFECTS

The two most important assessment objectives are **AO1** and **AO2**. They are about *what* writers do (the choices they make, and the effects these create), *what* your ideas are (your analysis and interpretation) and *how* you write about them (how well you explain your ideas).

### ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 1

What does it say?	What does it mean?	Dos and Don'ts
<p>Read, understand and respond to texts.</p> <p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response</li> <li>Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations</li> </ul>	<p>You must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use some of the literary terms you have learned (correctly!)</li> <li>Write in a professional way (not a sloppy, chatty way)</li> <li>Show that you have thought for yourself</li> <li>Back up your ideas with examples, including quotations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Don't write ...</b></p> <p><i>The monster is really ugly. Shelley uses horrible words to describe him.</i></p> <p><b>Do write ...</b></p> <p><i>Shelley's first description of the monster's appearance conveys Victor's horror at seeing the 'dull' and 'shrivelled' body parts that he has stitched together come to life. It is as if the reader is looking through Victor's eyes, 'unable to endure the aspect of the being'.</i></p>

### IMPROVING YOUR CRITICAL STYLE

Use a variety of words and phrases to show effects:

Shelley suggests ..., conveys ..., implies ..., presents how ..., explores ..., demonstrates ..., describes how ..., shows how ...

I/we (as readers) infer ..., recognise ..., understand ..., question ..., see ..., are given ..., reflect ...

For example, look at these two alternative paragraphs by different students about Elizabeth. Note the difference in the quality of expression:

Student A:

This makes it seem as if Shelley is speaking

Vague

Repetitive – better to use an alternative

Mary Shelley says that Elizabeth is nice and kind to everyone. She writes of 'our dear children' and 'our contented hearts'. This shows that Elizabeth is very happy at home and cares for Victor's brothers while he is not there. This shows that she is kind and patient. Shelley is saying that family life is very important.

Chatty and informal

Unclear whether 'She' refers to Shelley or Elizabeth

Student B:

Fits with the idea of the overall way Elizabeth is shown

Good variety of vocabulary

Phrase allows the student to explore the idea rather than state it as fact

Shelley presents Elizabeth as a kind, modest and virtuous figure when she writes to Victor in Chapter VI. She demonstrates her parental attitude towards Ernest and William with the affectionate phrase 'our dear children'. The adjectives 'placid' and 'contented' imply that she places domestic happiness above worldly ambition. Shelley also seems to be suggesting that despite her anxiety about Victor's welfare, she wishes to reassure him calmly that all is well and to wait patiently for his return.

Clear and precise language

Clear and precise language

Looks beyond the obvious and infers meaning with personal interpretation

### ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 2

What does it say?	What does it mean?	Dos and don'ts
<p>Analyse the language, form and structure used by the writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.</p>	<p>'Analyse' – comment in detail on particular aspects of the text or language.</p> <p>'Language' – vocabulary, <b>imagery</b>, variety of sentences, dialogue/speech etc.</p> <p>'Form' – <b>how</b> the story is told (e.g. first person narrative, letters, diaries, chapter by chapter)</p> <p>'Structure' – the <b>order</b> in which events are revealed, or in which characters appear, or <b>descriptions</b> are presented.</p> <p>'create meaning' – what can we, as readers, <b>infer</b> from what the writer tells us? What is <b>implied</b> by particular descriptions, or events?</p> <p>'Subject terminology' – <b>words</b> you should use when <b>writing</b> about novels, such as 'character', 'protagonist', 'imagery', 'setting' etc.</p>	<p><b>Don't write...</b></p> <p><i>The writing is really descriptive in this bit so you could really imagine Victor and the monster in the mountains.</i></p> <p><b>Do write...</b></p> <p><i>Shelley conveys how the Alpine setting comforts and inspires Victor as he observes 'the unstained snowy mountain-top, the glittering pinnacle ... the eagle, soaring amidst the clouds'. The symbolism of 'mountain-top', 'pinnacle' and 'soaring' are ironic, reminding the reader of the rapid deterioration in Victor's fortunes.</i></p>

### THE THREE 'I'S

- The best analysis focuses on specific ideas or events, or uses of language and thinks about what is **implied**.
- This means drawing **inferences**. On the surface, Victor's description of his childhood tells us how happy and loving it was, and how fortunate he was to have had this kind of upbringing, but what deeper ideas does it signify about Victor's emerging character and temperament, about ambition, books and education?
- From the inferences you make across the text as a whole, you can arrive at your own **interpretation** – a sense of the bigger picture, a wider evaluation of a person, relationship or idea.