



## Walton and Frankenstein

*The narrator, Captain Walton, has organised an expedition to the North Pole, which was the cherished dream of his youth, since he believed it might provide him with glory and universal praise. The only drawback is his deep loneliness: there is no one on the ship with whom he can share his hopes and fears. During his voyage a strange accident happens.*

Mary Shelley  
**Frankenstein, or The  
Modern Prometheus  
(1818)**

Letter IV

So strange an accident has happened to us that I cannot forbear<sup>1</sup> recording it, although it is very probable that you will see me before these papers can come into your possession.

Last Monday (July 31st), we were nearly surrounded by ice, which closed in the ship on all sides, scarcely leaving her the sea-room in which she floated. Our situation was somewhat dangerous, especially as we were compassed round<sup>2</sup> by a very thick fog. We accordingly lay to, hoping that some change would take place in the atmosphere and weather.

About two o'clock the mist cleared away, and we beheld<sup>3</sup>, stretched out in every direction, vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to have no end. Some of my comrades groaned<sup>4</sup>, and my own mind began to grow watchful with anxious thoughts, when a strange sight suddenly attracted our attention and diverted our solicitude from our own situation. We perceived a low carriage, fixed on a sledge<sup>5</sup> and drawn by dogs, pass on towards the north, at the distance of half a mile; a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge and guided the dogs. We watched the rapid progress of the traveller with our telescopes until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice.

This appearance excited our unqualified wonder. We were, as we believed, many hundred miles from any land; but this apparition seemed to denote that it was not; in reality, so distant as we had supposed. Shut in<sup>6</sup>, however, by ice, it was impossible to follow his track, which we had observed with the greatest attention.

About two hours after this occurrence we heard the ground sea<sup>7</sup>, and before night the ice broke and freed our ship. We, however, lay to until the morning, fearing to encounter in the dark those large loose masses which float about after the breaking up of the ice. I profited of this time to rest for a few hours.

In the morning, however, as soon as it was light, I went upon deck and found all the sailors busy on one side of the vessel, apparently talking to someone in the sea. It was, in fact, a sledge, like that we had seen before, which had drifted towards us in the night on a large fragment of ice. Only one dog remained alive; but there was a human being within it whom the sailors were persuading to enter the vessel. He was not, as the other traveller seemed to be, a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island, but a European. When I appeared on deck the master said, 'Here is our captain, and he will not allow you to perish on the open sea.'

On perceiving<sup>8</sup> me, the stranger addressed me in English, although with a foreign accent. 'Before I come on board your vessel,' said he, 'will you have the kindness to inform me whither<sup>9</sup> you are bound?'

You may conceive<sup>10</sup> my astonishment on hearing such a question addressed to me from a man on the brink<sup>11</sup> of destruction and to whom I should have supposed that my vessel would have been a resource which he would not have exchanged for the most precious wealth the earth can afford. I replied, however, that we were on a voyage of discovery towards the northern pole.

Upon hearing this he appeared satisfied and consented to come on board. Good God! Margaret, if you had seen the man who thus capitulated for his safety<sup>12</sup>, your surprise would have been boundless. His limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering. I never saw a man in so wretched a condition. We attempted to carry him into the cabin, but as soon as he had quitted the fresh air he fainted<sup>13</sup>. We accordingly brought him back to the deck and restored him to

- 1 forbear. Fare a meno, evitare di.
- 2 were compassed round. Eravamo circondati.
- 3 beheld. Vedemmo.
- 4 groaned. Gemettero.
- 5 sledge. Slitta.
- 6 Shut in. Bloccati.
- 7 we heard the ground sea. Udimmo lo scricchiolio (della superficie ghiacciata) del mare.
- 8 On perceiving. Scorgendo.
- 9 whither. Verso che luogo, dove.
- 10 conceive. Immaginare.
- 11 brink. Orlo.
- 12 capitulated for his safety. Lett.: capitolò per la sua salvezza, cioè: accettò di essere salvato.
- 13 fainted. Svenne.



animation by rubbing him with brandy and forcing him to swallow<sup>14</sup> a small quantity. As soon as he showed signs of life we wrapped him up in blankets and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen stove. By slow degrees he recovered and ate a little soup, which restored him wonderfully.

50

14 swallow. Ingoiare.

## VISUAL ANALYSIS

**1 READ** the text, divide it into five sections and write a heading for each of them.

**2 LOOK** at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.

	.....		.....
ice	.....	we	.....
	.....		.....
	.....		.....

**3 DISCUSS** the following questions in pairs.

- Who is the narrator of this text? Who is his addressee?
- What effect does the epistolary style create?
- What kind of atmosphere is predominant in the passage?
- Is there any relationship between the setting and the characters?
- How would you describe Walton's personality?
- What is the dominant theme of this text?

**4 COMPLETE** the summary of the passage with the words from the box.

gloomy	anxiety	sledge	rescued	shape	surrounded
limbs	stature	fatigue	mist	crew	North Pole



Captain Walton, the narrator of this passage, is aiming for the **(1)** ..... At the beginning, his ship is **(2)** ..... by a thick fog, then at about two o'clock the **(3)** ..... clears. His **(4)** ..... perceives a low carriage fixed on a **(5)** ..... drawn by dogs and guided up by a strange creature having the **(6)** ..... of a man but of a gigantic **(7)** ..... At the end of the text a man, whose name is unknown, is **(8)** ..... and brought on board. His **(9)** ..... are frozen and his body is emaciated by **(10)** ..... and suffering. The whole text is pervaded by a mysterious, **(11)** ..... atmosphere full of suspense. A close relationship between nature and human feelings is present throughout the text: hope and **(12)** ..... characterise the crew's sensations. The main theme of the text is mystery.

**5 WRITE** 10-12 lines showing how Mary Shelley fits into her literary and historical context. Remember that she was influenced by many contemporary ideas, but she also followed the tradition of Samuel Richardson (→ Text Bank 21), who used the epistolary form, and Daniel Defoe (→ 3.10) and Jonathan Swift (→ 3.11), who used narrators apparently telling of their 'true' journeys to introduce a fantastic tale.