

*CHAPITRE DE LIVRE*

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« Gender, Authorship and Male Domination: Mary Shelley's Limited Freedom in "Frankenstein" and "The Last Man" »

Michael E. Sinatra

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cal means of achievement ... Castruccio will unite in himself the lion and the fox'.

13. Anne Mellor in Ruoff, p. 284.
14. Shelley read the first in May and the second in June 1820. She also read *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) for the third time in February 1820, having previously read it in 1815 and 1817. A long tradition of educated female poets, novelists, and dramatists of sensibility extending back to Charlotte Smith and Hannah Cowley in the 1780s also lies behind the figure of the rational, feeling female in Shelley, who read Smith in 1816 and 1818 (MWSJ I, pp. 318–20, II, pp. 670, 676).
15. On the entrenchment of 'conservative nostalgia for a Burkean model of a naturally evolving organic society' in the 1820s, see Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p. 177; and Elie Halévy, *The Liberal Awakening, 1815–1830*, trans. E. I. Watkin (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961) pp. 128–32.
16. It is significant, too, that in the few instances in *Valperga* where Shelley actually introduces quotations from Romantic poets, they are unidentified and tend to be constituted as inheritors of an Italian tradition. The most striking instance occurs with 'Tis said, that some have died for love'. Not only has Shelley chosen an example of Wordsworth's experimentation with the canzone but the poet is also seen as giving voice to what the fictitious Euthanasia had felt six hundred years previously: 'she would exclaim as a modern poet has since done; 'Thou, thrush, that singest loud, and loud, and free ...'. Twice Shelley quotes briefly from 'Ode to the West Wind', the only poem in terza rima by P.B. Shelley to be published in his lifetime (V 191, 204, 233 [II. viii, II. x, III. 227]).
17. Bennett, *Evidence*, p. 363.
18. On the character of Beatrice see Barbara Jane O'Sullivan, 'Beatrice in *Valperga*: A New Cassandra', in *Other MS*.
19. Jane Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels: 'This Child of Imagination and Misery'* (Basingstoke: Macmillan and Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993) pp. 99–100; Joseph Lew, 'God's Sister: History and Ideology in *Valperga*', *Other MS*, p. 171.
20. Bennett, *Evidence*, p. 363.

## 6 Gender, Authorship and Male Domination: Mary Shelley's limited Freedom in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*

Michael Eberle-Sinatra

[T]he man of genius lives most in the ideal world, in which the present is still constituted by the future or the past.

(Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*)<sup>1</sup>

*Frankenstein*, Paula R. Feldman rightly says, is:

a novel about itself and about its author's relation to it. At its heart lies Mary Shelley's individual struggle with the act of creation, a struggle characterized by fear as much as by ambition.<sup>2</sup>

Ever since Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976), *Frankenstein* has been recognized as a novel in which issues about authorship are intimately bound up with those of gender. The work has frequently been related to the circumstance of Shelley's combining the biological role of mother with the social role of author.<sup>3</sup> The creation of the Creature and Victor's attempt at transgressing the rules of nature have been widely understood as an expression of what Chris Baldick calls '[Shelley's] mixed feelings, both assertive and guilty, of the adolescent for whom fully adult identity means both motherhood and (in her circle) authorship too'.<sup>4</sup>

Authorship and its gendering are no less, I would argue, central thematic concerns in *The Last Man*. Indeed, both Shelley's first and her third novel evidence a struggle, in paratext and text, over whether she is to be present as a (pseudo-) male author, a female author, a usurped author or an author of indeterminate gender, a struggle in which the 'fear' and 'ambition' mentioned by Feldman in the opening quotation are key operatives.

To take ambition first: Shelley writes as the daughter of two success-

ful and well-known authors, who is expected and encouraged to become an author herself, as she herself testifies in her Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*:

My husband . . . was from the very first, very anxious that I should prove myself worthy of my parentage, and enrol myself on the page of fame. He was for ever inciting me to obtain literary reputation. (F 176)<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, purely literary mothers also existed. In 1818 there was an established tradition of writers – notably Ann Radcliffe – who in the previous generation had developed gothic into a genre that an ambitious and gifted young woman might respectably attempt without thereby being ‘unsexed’.

Yet Shelley frequently betrays awareness of the strains of writing in a male-oriented society where the image of woman as passive and docile, embodying beauty and delicacy, still is dominant, an awareness in which fear and insecurity are present. In one of the most interesting elements of the 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, anxiety about being ‘unsexed’ is uppermost. This emerges from her attempt to answer the question which she declares most people naturally ask her: ‘How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?’ (F 175).<sup>6</sup> Nor could Radcliffe’s novels have been plausibly invoked by Shelley as offering a precedent for and thus a defence of *Frankenstein*. Shelleyan gothic would certainly have incurred the censure of Radcliffe, who strongly criticized the literary use of horror (as distinct from terror or suspense) in her posthumously published 1826 article on the supernatural in poetry.<sup>7</sup>

Writing *The Last Man* gave Shelley the opportunity to create a space in which she could express her anxiety about her future as a writer, as well as to recount the part of her past life that she missed so terribly.<sup>8</sup> It also allowed her to set down in writing her sense of insecurity within London society upon her return to England in August 1823.<sup>9</sup> This insecurity, however, was expressed and assuaged rather than exorcized by the act of writing. Even though the publication of three novels and her husband’s *Posthumous Poems* had by the mid-1820s established Shelley’s fame, she seems to disclaim any role as a woman of letters. In a letter of 5 January 1828 she protested that ‘my sex has precluded all idea of my fulfilling public employments’ (MWSL II, p. 22).<sup>10</sup> Confined within the limits of a society that attempts to impose a passive role on women and to enclose them within the

private sphere, Shelley seems to adhere, at least publicly, to the prescribed norm.

But do *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* reflect this adherence? Or can they be perceived as working within the normative in such a way that they embody a criticism of it? Is her adoption of male protagonists and male narrators in these novels a tribute – a homage even – to the men in her life, particularly her father, P.B. Shelley and Byron, or a transgressive act encoding a protest against male domination?<sup>11</sup>

In engaging with these questions, I find it helpful to refer to Gérard Genette’s theory of the paratext, that is, everything that does not belong directly to the literary text itself and yet can be perceived as part of the work: title page, name of the author, epigraph, dedication, preface, afterword and notes. All these materials constitute a special space ‘around’ the text that is both a transitional space and a transactional space.<sup>12</sup> Readers have access to the literary text via the preamble of the paratext. They may not pay attention to the elements constituting the paratext but these elements are nevertheless crucial to the understanding of the work.

## I The title

Both titles indicate the content of the novels: *Frankenstein* is the story of Victor Frankenstein and *The Last Man* is the narrative of the last man on earth. Both end with their chief characters left ‘Companionless/As the last cloud of an expiring storm’,<sup>13</sup> Lionel Verney as last of his race, the Creature as the first and last of *his* (unnamed) race. But both titles are also the sites of strong misreading. *Frankenstein* has been famously misunderstood to refer to the Creature. I would suggest that the long-standing confusion in the mind of the public between Frankenstein as the creator, that is Victor Frankenstein, and Frankenstein the unnamed Creature, epitomizes the displacement of discourse and naming in the novel. What is not named in the text acquires an identity through the confused misinterpretation of the novel by the reader.

An analogous misinterpretation has historically dogged the title, *The Last Man*, as a result not only of contemporary reviewers’ know-ingness about the gender of the author but also of an ambiguity in the title itself. Although Lionel Verney, the main character of the novel, is the Last Man once the plague has eliminated the rest of humanity, contemporary readers of the novel identified Shelley, the female writer, with the narrator. The anonymous reviewer of *The Last Man* in

*The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* of February 1826 exploits this paratextual information, mischievously choosing to interpret 'man' as meaning 'member of the male sex' rather than 'member of the human race' when he wonders why Shelley did not choose to name the novel *The Last Woman*. The last woman would, the reviewer claims, 'have known better how to paint her distress at having nobody left to talk to'.<sup>14</sup>

## II The name of the author

Most critics assumed that the anonymously authored *Frankenstein* was written by a male disciple of the dedicatee, William Godwin, and several supposed this disciple to be none other than P.B. Shelley himself. The two-volume 1823 edition of *Frankenstein*, published at Godwin's instigation in order to coincide with the early theatrical adaptations of the novel, significantly changed this situation. Godwin dropped the title-page epigraph of the novel from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as well as the dedication to himself, and identified the author as 'Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley'.<sup>15</sup> Thus the reading public was informed that the author of *Frankenstein* was the daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft and the widow of P.B. Shelley, this act rendering superfluous any repetition of the information on the title pages of Shelley's later novels. The name on the title page of *The Last Man* is 'The Author of *Frankenstein*'. This measure was undoubtedly a pragmatic one. It simultaneously associated Shelley with the Great Unknown, Walter Scott, 'The Author of *Waverley*', and ensured Timothy Shelley's satisfaction at not seeing his son's name in print again.

Yet I would suggest that assigning *The Last Man* to 'The Author of *Frankenstein*' also points to an unstable gendering of the novel. The 'Author of *Frankenstein*' is not assigned a gender, but referred to only as the author of a previous work which itself had an intricate history of authorship in its early version. Ultimately, it is not until the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* that Shelley herself is able textually to assert her authorship of that work and choose to place her name on the engraved title page.<sup>16</sup> The 1823 'outing' was Godwin's choice and not hers. This new 'threshold' text allows Shelley to claim her identity as a female writer. However, she retains the freedom of unstable gendering by retaining 'The Author of *Frankenstein*' on the printed title page.<sup>17</sup>

## III The epigraph

The subtitle of *Frankenstein*, 'The Modern Prometheus', encodes a reference to the myth of Prometheus as the creator of man/the human race. The title pages for each volume of the 1818 edition contain a quotation from Milton's *Paradise Lost* that also refers to the creation of man:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay  
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee  
From darkness to promote me?

(*Paradise Lost*, X. 743–5)

As Lucy Newlyn has pointed out, *Frankenstein* is 'a revisionary reading of *Paradise Lost*'.<sup>18</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have also defined *Frankenstein* as Shelley's attempt:

to take the male culture myth of *Paradise Lost* at its full values – on its own terms, including all the analogies and parallels it implies – and [to] rewrite it so as to clarify its meaning.<sup>19</sup>

*Frankenstein* is also, I would contend, a supplement to that poem and a *rifacimento*. That is to say, Shelley's work develops certain Miltonic themes further, and acts as a replacement of *Paradise Lost* and of the Prometheus myth as encountered in Hesiod and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. The result is Shelley's re-writing the myths of the creation of man as *Frankenstein* and re-writing the myths of man's subsequent extinction in *The Last Man*, an extinction which the epigraph on the volume title pages, also from *Paradise Lost*, portends:

Let no man seek  
Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall  
Him or his children.

(*Paradise Lost*, XI. 770–2)

In Shelley's interpretation, Man becomes his own creator insofar as Victor Frankenstein can create life and thus circumvent any divine or female participation. Man also becomes his own annihilator with his role in the proliferation of the plague, 'a spectre conjured up by xenophobia, sexism and racism', in *The Last Man*.<sup>20</sup> Woman (in the person of Evadne) identifies herself with destruction, and 'enacts the revenge of female power against control'.<sup>21</sup>

Shelley re-writes myths, only to produce new myths in which women are even less present than in the Miltonic epic; there is, after all, no Eve at the end of the novels, either for the Creature or for Lionel. Yet the very conspicuousness of this absence constitutes a critique of 'things as they are'. An imagined future universe of desolation in which women are *annihilated* recalls the reader to a renewed recognition of the injustice of an actual present world in which they are merely *controlled, marginalized and subordinated*. As Bette London remarks (specifically of *Frankenstein*, but her words apply equally to *The Last Man*): 'the presence of the novel's self-consciously male texts ... illuminate the absences they cover, to expose the self-contradictions they repress'.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV The Preface/the Introduction

Prefatory matter is both a site for contention over ownership of the novels and for the construction of an author of indeterminate gender. P.B. Shelley not only wrote the preface to the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* but would seem to have replaced one that Shelley had previously written.<sup>23</sup> On 14 May 1817, Shelley wrote in her journal: 'Read Pliny and Clarke – S. reads Hist of Fr. Rev. and corrects F. write Preface – Finis' (*MWSJ* I, p. 169). As Charles Robinson notes, this entry 'suggests that MWS herself wrote a preface after she transcribed her novel' and 'it appears that it was discarded in favor of the published Preface written by PBS' (*Frankenstein Notebooks* I, lxxxv–lxxxvi). Of course there is no way of knowing the degree to which P.B. Shelley took the initiative here.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, however one reconstructs the process whereby P.B. Shelley became the one who assumed the prefatorial role of presenting the book to readers and explaining its intentions, the salient point is that Shelley did, by relinquishing this role to her husband, deprive herself of an important paratextual function of authorship.

There are various ways in which we can interpret this self-dispossession. One is to regard it as a necessary component of a literary hoax. The Shelleys had taken pains successfully to hoodwink both the publishers and the public into thinking that the gender of the author was male. The possibility of a 'young girl' writing such a story was ruled out, as the various reviews show.<sup>25</sup> P.B. Shelley's own review of *Frankenstein*, unpublished during his lifetime, and perhaps intended for *The Examiner*, also refers to the author as a man. He sent a complimentary copy of *Frankenstein* with an accompanying letter couched in

such terms as, without telling an outright lie, might mislead Walter Scott, whose subsequent review in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* duly assumed that P.B. Shelley was the author. Shelley appears to have connived readily in this ruse. Yet once *Frankenstein* was published and was enjoying its *réclame* in the summer of 1818, she was not content to allow her position to be usurped. She was quick to write to Scott in June 1818 that she was:

anxious to prevent your continuing in the mistake of supposing Mr Shelley guilty of a juvenile attempt of mine; to which – from its being written at an early age, I abstained from putting my name – and from respect to those persons from whom I bear it. I have therefore kept it concealed except from a few friends.

(*MWSL* I, p. 71)

This extract reveals not only Shelley's keen desire to repossess the authorship of the novel,<sup>26</sup> even though it is 'a juvenile attempt', but also her consciousness of her husband and parents, 'those persons from whom I bear [my name]', who, she declares, have determined her choice not to assert her position publicly alongside them.

When, however, we turn to the 'Introduction' to *The Last Man* we encounter a fascinating instance of this reversal of gendered patterns. Instead of a preface which is actually male-authored and assumed to be so by the reading public, but which is not overtly identified as such, we have an introduction which is female-authored, known to be so by the reading public, but which is presented as written by someone of uncertain gender. The anonymous 'Introduction' corresponds perfectly to Genette's definition of a *préface crypto-auctorial*, that is to say a preface for which the author pretends not to be the author or only claims the authorship of the preface from the whole work.<sup>27</sup> Within the 'Introduction' Shelley presents herself as the mere editor of the novel:

For the merits of my adaptation and translation must decide how far I have well bestowed my time and imperfect powers, in giving form and substance to the frail and attenuated Leaves of the Sibyl.

(*LM* 9 [Intro.])

The question of gender in this introduction is particularly intriguing, as Anne Mellor comments:

neither the Author in the 'Author's Introduction' nor the 'companion' is assigned a gender. Most readers have assumed that the Author is Shelley, her companion Percy. However, the three lines quoted from the sonnet that Petrarch wrote to his dead patron Giacomo Colonna implicitly align the voice of the Author with the male gender. Is Shelley here raising the possibility of a new kind of subject in which gender is absent, or at the least, unstable, fluid, unimportant?<sup>28</sup>

I would assert that instability and fluidity of gender is precisely what Shelley aims at in her preface and in the novel in general, and that these qualities relate to the novel's prophetic aspect. Writing about prefaces, Derrida has remarked that 'the text exists as something written – a past – which, under the false appearance of a present, a hidden omnipotent author (in full mastery of his product) is presenting to the reader as his future.'<sup>29</sup> This quotation sums up Shelley's novel, which is indeed 'a past' (a narrative retelling the story of the last man), 'a present' (an author presenting her/his work to a reader), and 'a future' (a possible future for the world and civilization). By its very instability with regard to gender, the preface exemplifies Shelley's attempt at presenting to the reader a work in which the characters merge or exchange qualities (virtues or defects) conventionally assigned to one or the other sex. (In Evadne, for instance, a 'masculine' artistic genius co-exists with 'feminine' jealousy; in Raymond, 'masculine' will-to-power co-exists with 'feminine' narcissism and caprice. Idris has a 'masculine' intellect while her brother possesses a 'feminine' physical frailty.) Describing *The Last Man* as a prophecy, the preface also allows the reader to see the work as a warning against allowing history to repeat a story of the repression of women and their erasure from the record. The plague stresses this repression by the very fact that it is gendered as female in *The Last Man*, and functions both metaphorically and literally against the male domination present in the novel. The reader is stimulated to imagine an alternative future history, in which the story of woman will be fully incorporated into the story of humanity and in which repressed female energies will not return as annihilating forces.<sup>30</sup>

## V Literary education and authorship

Turning from the paratextual to the textual, I now wish to focus on one way in which Shelley encodes within the two novels her frustra-

tion at male domination while demonstrating the importance of a literary education.<sup>31</sup> In *Frankenstein* literature is crucial to the Creature's education; in *The Last Man*, the same is true of the education of Lionel and his sister Perdita. Lionel, the Wordsworthian child of the Lake District at the beginning of the novel, describes this when he declares:

I was already well acquainted with what I may term the panorama of nature, the change of seasons, and the various appearances of heaven and earth. But I was at once startled and enchanted by my sudden extension of vision, when the curtain, which had been drawn before the intellectual world, was withdrawn, and I saw the universe, not only as it presented itself to my outward senses, but as it had appeared to the wisest among men. Poetry and its creations, philosophy and its researches and classifications, alike awoke the sleeping ideas in my mind, and gave me new ones.

(LM 27 [I. ii])

Shelley emphasizes the need for education as a key both to understanding and possible change in society through her narrator Lionel, whose intellectual awakening stimulates him to become a writer, and for whom books:

stood in the place of an active career, of ambition, and those palpable excitements necessary to the multitude.... As my authorship increased, I acquired new sympathies and pleasures.... Suddenly I became as it were the father of all mankind. Posterity became my heirs.

(LM 122 [I. x]).

The importance here invested in authorship shows up a major difference between Victor and Lionel. Victor illustrates the male attempt at transgressing the biological limits of his sex. Lionel's 'transgression', however, is so merely by analogy. He seems to himself to 'father' mankind in a metaphorical process of asexual reproduction. He immediately attempts to win his sister to participate in the same pursuits as he. Perdita, intellectually active but relatively uneducated, thinks at first that Lionel's craving for knowledge is only, in her words, 'a new gloss upon an old reading, and her own was sufficiently inexhaustible to content her' (LM 122 [I. x]). But when she gains access to literature she discovers that:

amidst all her newly acquired knowledge, her own character, which formerly she fancied that she thoroughly understood, became the first in rank among the terræ incognitæ, the pathless wilds of a country that had no chart.

(LM 123–4 [I. x])

Despite the fact that Lionel attempts gently to entice the female into the magic circle of knowledge, the relationship between them remains an unequal one: the brother is in charge of his sister's education. Perdita never, in fact, becomes an author. Her widened horizons narrow as she applies her new-found knowledge to introspection rather than outwards towards composition; she continues to behave like a Byronic heroine to whom love is 'woman's whole existence' and this is the eventual cause of her death. Under what conditions, the reader asks, could Lionel and Perdita have collaborated in a work? Each would have had to step outside a prescribed gender role – Perdita that of the love-lorn female, Lionel that of the moulder of his sister's mind. Yet Lionel, in as much as he is a fictional character, a male author created by a female author, still represents the possibility of an as-yet-unrealized un-gendered writing for a non-existent, and thus also un-gendered, readership.

In both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, Shelley presents gender issues in a way that is not overtly defined. She herself seems to have taken on a position of resignation in her life as far as male dominance in society was concerned. Yet I would argue that the two novels that I have discussed belie her apparent acceptance of this state of affairs. It is precisely the expression of this accepted female passivity that Shelley writes against. And she does so by portraying her female characters as conspicuously absent or secondary. Thus, she reflects adversely upon a society where women are subordinated or relegated to separate spheres, where men think of themselves, incorrectly, as the masters of knowledge. At the same time her self-presentation as an author of indeterminate gender points towards a possible alternative future in which the conventional polite disclaimer of the female writer ('my sex has precluded all idea of my fulfilling public employments') will no longer serve any purpose. *The Last Man* could be subtitled 'Remembrance of Things to Come': the tale of Verney is to be an example of what had happened and what would happen to society, were it not to change in the direction of that alternative imagined future.

## Notes

I would like to thank Charles Robinson, Joel Pace, Astrid Wind and Chris Koenig-Woodyard for their comments on earlier versions of this essay, which was also presented as a conference paper at 'Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein' (University of Bristol, February 1997) and 'Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley in Her Times' (New York, May 1997).

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983) I, p. 43.
2. Paula R. Feldman, 'The Psychological Mystery of *Frankenstein*', in *Approaches to Teaching Shelley's Frankenstein*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990) p. 71.
3. Many critics have explained the absence of mothers in *Frankenstein* as due to the difficulty for Shelley of coping with her mother's death; see for instance Barbara Johnson, 'My Monster/My Self', *Diacritics*, 12 (1982) 2–10, and Stephen Behrendt, 'Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Woman Writer's Fate', in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, eds Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1995) pp. 69–87, hereafter Feldman and Kelley.
4. Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) p. 32.
5. The negative side of this 'encouragement' was expressed by Claire Clairmont, who declared caustically in 1833: 'in our family if you cannot write an epic poem or a novel that by its originality knocks all other novels on the head, you are a despicable creature not worth acknowledging' (*The Clairmont Correspondence*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking, 2 vols (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) I, p. 295).
6. Leigh Hunt humorously wrote of Shelley in 1837:

And Shelley, four famed, – for her parents, her lord,  
And the poor lone impossible monster abhorred.  
(So sleek and so smiling she came, people stared,  
To think such fair clay should so darkly have dared . . .);  
(‘Blue-Stocking Revels’ II, lines 209–12; my emphasis)

7. Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *The New Monthly Magazine*, XVI (1826) 149. Radcliffe came out in favour of terror which, according to her, makes the reader experience interest to a higher degree and of a superior kind than that excited by horror.
8. The novel is the most personal that she wrote and published during her lifetime. As Fiona Stafford notes, 'Mary Shelley's decision' to embark on a novel describing the decimation of the entire human race (bar the narrator), was directly related to the traumas of losing her husband and children' (Fiona Stafford, *The Last of the Race: the Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994] p. 7).
9. She had expressed such doubts as early as 18 January 1824 when she recorded in her journal: 'I have been nearly four months in England and if

I am to judge of the future by the past and ~~future~~ the present, I have small delight in looking forward' (MWSJ I, p. 470). The similarity in feeling with regard to society between Shelley and Lionel Verney, the main protagonist and narrator of *The Last Man*, is expressed at the beginning of the second volume of the novel, where Verney exclaims:

How unwise had the wanderers been, who had deserted its shelter, entangled themselves in the web of society, and entered on what men of the world call 'life,' – that labyrinth of evil, that scheme of mutual torture.

(LM 172 [II. iv])

10. This reaction had been called out by a request from the *Ladies Museum* to feature her as one of their monthly 'portraits'. She had good reason to be suspicious of the good faith of the *Ladies' Museum*, a genteel monthly without the prestige of the Great Reviews. Two years previously it had briefly dismissed her *Last Man* with the conventional judgement that her talents were wasted on subjects 'too extravagant for common conception'. Yet her refusal is too consonant with other remarks scattered throughout her correspondence to be dismissed as an *ad hoc* response. For instance, in a letter to John Cam Hobhouse dated 10 November 1824 she commented: 'I have an invincible objection to the seeing my name in print' (MWSL I, p. 455).
11. She dedicated the first edition of *Frankenstein* to Godwin, and both P.B. Shelley and Byron can be seen as depicted in her novels under the various characters of Victor Frankenstein, Clerval, Adrian and Lord Raymond.
12. Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Collection Poétique (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987) p. 8.
13. P.B. Shelley, *Adonais*, lines 272–3, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977) p. 399.
14. *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.*, 473 (1826) 103. Shelley herself had anticipated such an identification in her well-known journal-entry of 14 May 1824, in which she writes: 'The last man! Yes I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions, extinct before me ...' (MWSJ II, p. 476–7).
15. For suggestions as to Godwin's possible motives, see note 7 of Nora Crook's contribution in this volume.
16. As Stephen Behrendt shrewdly remarks, the 1831 preface also constitutes 'a gesture of authority by which [Shelley's] own authorial voice supersedes the ventriloquistic voice of her dead husband in the [1818] preface' (Feldman and Kelley, p. 84).
17. Colburn and Bentley's Standard Novels series (in which the 1831 edition appeared) had two title pages. The engraved title page remained the same while the printed title page varied according to the dates of subsequent impressions.
18. Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) p. 134. For an illuminating discussion of Shelley's use of *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein*, see Newlyn, pp. 133–9.
19. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) p. 220.
20. I accept here that reading of the plague which sees its literal, biological existence as inseparable from the moral and ideological; this reading is persuasively articulated by Anne McWhir, from the introduction to whose edition of *The Last Man* my quotation is taken. McWhir argues that Raymond's will to power is unconsciously complicit with the spread of the plague: it is more than hinted that the blowing up of the plague-ridden Constantinople, which he has been besieging, releases the seeds of disease which are then disseminated by winds throughout the world (*The Last Man*, ed. A. R. McWhir [Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1996] pp. xxviii–xxxii).
21. McWhir, introd. *The Last Man*, p. xxv.
22. Bette London, 'Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Spectacle of Masculinity', *PMLA*, 108.2 (1993) 260.
23. In the 1831 Preface, Shelley writes that 'As far as I can recollect, [the preface] was entirely written by [P.B. Shelley]'. Regina B. Oost offers an enriching reading of the 1818 preface in terms of marketing technique in the 1820s, although she does not take into account the gender politics at play in P.B. Shelley's writing of the preface; see Regina B. Oost, 'Marketing *Frankenstein*: the Shelleys' Enigmatic Preface', *English Language Notes*, XXXV, 1 (1997) 26–35. Charles Robinson's edition of the *Frankenstein Notebooks* has demonstrated that P.B. Shelley's involvement is not as crucial and intrusive to Shelley's novel as some critics (such as James Rieger and the editors of the Broadview *Frankenstein*) have considered it to be; nevertheless, he is still a presence in the published text.
24. For instance, Shelley herself may have become dissatisfied with her preface and (preoccupied with her new-born daughter Clara, and fatigued with lack of sleep after the birth) delegated its rewriting to her husband.
25. *The British Critic's* reviewer, who, alone among his peers, was aware of the true gender of the author, seems to have been given special information, but the source remains unknown.
26. Nevertheless I agree in general with Zachary Leader that, though Shelley 'may have taken authorship seriously, ... she also found it difficult to think of herself as an author, and her early journals and letters barely mention composition' (Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996] p. 185).
27. Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, p. 172. For a discussion of P. B. Shelley's use of a *préface crypto-auctorial* in his poem *Epipsychidion*, see my article 'Shelley's Editing Process in the Preface to *Epipsychidion*', *Keats-Shelley Review*, 11 (1997) 167–81.
28. Anne K. Mellor, 'Introduction', *The Last Man*, ed. Hugh J. Luke, Jr (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965; new edn 1993) pp. xxiv–xxv.
29. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981) p. 7.
30. In saying this, I dissent from those readings which assume that the novel demands that, within its fictive world, we accept the inevitable annihila-

tion of mankind by plague as the only possible future, without alternatives. Even if the Sybil is accepted as having absolutely true knowledge of the future, the transmission of her prophecies is carried out by a decidedly imperfect process. Some of the lost leaves may have contained material which reversed the desolate ending; the editor has pieced out the missing record with non-Sybilline material in order to make a continuous narrative and may have assembled the recovered leaves incorrectly. 'Doubtless' the editor confesses, 'the leaves of the Cumæan Sybil have suffered distortion ... in my hands' (*LM* 8 [Intro.]).

31. Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft had already written about this issue in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). So had several other prominent women writers, such as Catharine Macaulay in *Letters on Education* (1783) and Hannah More in *Strictures on Female Education* (1799).

## 7

### 'The Truth in Masquerade': Cross-dressing and Disguise in Mary Shelley's Short Stories

A. A. Markley

One of the most interesting aspects of the body of Mary Shelley's fiction is the remarkable frequency with which she experimented with the plot devices of identity switches, clothes changes, disguise, and cross-dressing, particularly in the case of women altering their dress in order to pass as men. The interpretative question that then arises concerns the extent to which these episodes embody a critique of the rigid gender restrictions which women have suffered under historically. By presenting women who function successfully outside their restricted gender roles, did Shelley intend to call attention to the fact that women are capable of achieving far more than societal restrictions allowed? Or, in fashioning viable plots that would hold the attention of the readership of the annuals, was she rather drawing on the reversal of societal convention achieved by the carnivalesque and the masquerade, as Shakespeare and Byron had done, in order to entertain her audience?

In coming to terms with these questions, I hope to demonstrate the extent to which Shelley as an artist was continuously involved in responding to and reworking both historical and contemporary literary traditions. The dynamic nature of her involvement in these traditions is exhibited even in her short stories, which have too often been ignored as short pieces that she tossed off – albeit by her own admission – to make ends meet in the 1820s and 1830s as she struggled to support herself and her son in England after P.B. Shelley's death.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that the tales that she wrote for annuals such as *The Keepsake* took her away from her work on the longer novels that she wished to be able to pursue full-time, they demonstrate a great amount of technical artistry. As a group, they display a profound engagement with the themes and conventions of English literature