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The voice unbound : Mary Shelley's vision of romanticism

Courtenay Noelle Smith

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M.A., University of Richmond, August 1991
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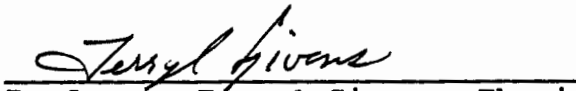
Mary Shelley was propelled into fame while still a teenager because of her powerful and "gothic" novel Frankenstein. This novel and several facts about the author's personal life have kept her in the public eye since her death. Though Frankenstein has long been a subject of scholarship, Mary Shelley has been little studied directly in relation to the great literary movement, Romanticism, in which she participated

Romantic literature is pervaded by numerous political and aesthetic tensions, in particular the paradox of the ideals of genius and fellowship. In many of the Romantic works readers and scholars will find that the poets largely consign themselves to achieving one of these ideals, namely genius, at the cost of sacrificing the other, fellowship. The poets themselves either did not believe this paradox was reconcilable or did not seek for an alternative resolution.

Mary Shelley emerges from the Romantic tradition to become it's critic. In her works Frankenstein and The Last Man she explores the Romantic paradox and suggests possible reconciliation to a seemingly irreconcilable tension. Mary Shelley, the person and author, was an important member of the Romantic circle, though she often transcends their

ideals. Growing Mary Shelley scholarship is a testimony to her long deserved recognition as more than just the author of one of the era's most famous novels.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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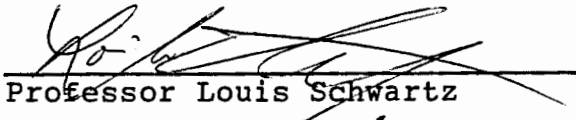

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The Voice Unbound:
Mary Shelley's Vision of Romanticism

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Preface & Acknowledgements

Mary Wollstonecraft claimed that her daughter nursed "so manfully that her father reckons on her writing the second parts of the Rights of Woman" (Solomon 16). Mary Shelley did indeed write the second part of "Rights" - in her life and her work. She is an author well worth being read, studied, and read again. It was not easy to select from the repertoire of her works. I finally decided on Frankenstein, because it is her masterpiece, and The Last Man, because it is little known, seldom read, and rarely studied. The juxtaposition is interesting.

I have benefited in many ways from my study of Mary Shelley's Romantic vision. I have not only integrated myself into Mary Shelley scholarship, but have gained a more complete understanding of the tensions, nuances, and aesthetics of the literary era we recognize as the Romantic Movement. Through the intensity of Mary Shelley's vision I have also gained a greater understanding of the political and social climate of the first half of the 19th century in England. Furthermore, my own life has been enriched.

Through history we heighten our comprehension and awareness of ourselves, and through history we are and we create more histories. Betty T. Bennett and Charles Robinson eloquently capture this very perspective in the introduction to their Mary Shelley reader. They describe Victor Frankenstein and his creature's destruction as

symbolizing "the central dilemma of the early 19th century: how will the dawning age establish moral values that keep pace with rapidly changing technological advances and political ideologies?" (3) If we substitute the advances of our age for the 19th century "we recognize the questions as the same [questions] we continue to struggle with today" (3).

I wish to thank my thesis readers, Professor Givens, Professor Schwartz, and Professor Taylor for their time and effort; my advisor, Professor Terryl Givens, for his patience, criticism, and advice during my years at The University of Richmond. And for their inspiration, encouragement, and support, I thank my parents.

Courtenay Noelle Smith

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN
Painting by John Opie
(Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.)

WILLIAM GODWIN
Painting by James Northcote
(Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.)

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY
Miniature by Reginald Easton
(Courtesy of Bodleian Library, Oxford.)

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY
Painting by Richard Rothwell
(Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.)

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
Painting by Amelia Curran
(Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.)

6 "The Nightmare" by Henry Fuseli

Chronology

[There have been slight discrepancies in dates depending on the source. Bennett and Robinson's The Mary Shelley Reader, has served as the authority for most dates particularly, those concerning Mary Shelley's life.]

1667

John Milton write "Paradise Lost"

1759

Edward Young writes "Conjectures on Original Composition;" April - Mary Wollstonecraft is born.

1792

Mary Wollstonecraft writes A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; August 4th - Percy Byssche Shelley is born at Field Place in Sussex.

1794

William Godwin writes Caleb Williams; Fanny Imlay, Wollstonecraft's illegitimate child, is born.

1795

Mary Wollstonecraft attempts two suicides

1797

March 29th - Wollstonecraft and Godwin marry; August 30th - Mary Shelley is born; September 10th - Mary Wollstonecraft dies from complications in childbirth; 1797-1801 - "Das Antheneum;" 1791-1800 - Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

1798

Godwin publishes his memoires and Wollstonecraft's 4 volume posthumous works; Wordsworth composes "Anecdote for Fathers," "Lines Written in Early Spring," and parts of "The Prelude."

1799

Wordsworth composes "The Fountain"

1800

Wordsworth composes "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"

1801

Godwin marries Mrs. Jane Clairmont

1808

Publication of Mary Shelley's childhood book, Mounseer Nongtong Paw

1812

June 7th - November 10th Mary lives with the Baxter family in Dundee, Scotland; November 11th - Mary meets Shelley and his wife Harriet; Shelley and Godwin have been corresponding since January of this year.

1814

Mary returns home permanently on March 30th; May 13th - She and Shelley meet again; in June they declare their love; July 28th - Mary and Shelley elope, Jane (Claire) accompany them; July-August they travel in France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland. The records of this trip form the basis for History of a Six Weeks Tour published anonymously in 1817; September 13th - the trio returns to London;

November 30th - Charles Shelley, Shelley and Harriet's second child, is born.

1815

Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria;" February 22nd - Mary's first child, a daughter, is born; March 6th - the child dies.

1816

Byron's "Manfred;" January 24th - Mary has a son, William; Summer in Geneva with Byron (they travel from May 3-August 29); Mary begins Frankenstein; October 9th - Fanny Imlay commits suicide. Godwin refuses to claim her body, she is buries anonymously in a pauper's grave; in December Harriet Shelley, pregnant with an illegitimate child commits suicide. Shelley does not express remorse or accept responsibility; December 30th - Mary and Shelley are married at St. Mildred's, Bread St., London.

1817

Shelley begins "Prometheus Unbound;" January 12th - Claire gives birth to Allegra, Byron's child; March 27th - Shelley is denied custody of his children from Harriet; in May Frankenstein is completed; September 2 - Clara Everina is born; in November Six Weeks Tour is published.

1818

January 1 - Frankenstein is published; March 12th - Mary and Shelley leave for Italy; September 24th - Clara Everina dies.

1819

June 7th - William dies; November 12th - Percy Florence, the only surviving child of Mary and Shelley, is born; Mathilda is completed, unpublished in Mary's lifetime.

1820

April - May Mary writes "Prosperine" and "Midas;"

1821

The Shelleys meet Edward and Jane Williams at Pisa; Byron arrives in November.

1822

John Trelawny arrives in Pisa; June 16th - Mary has a near fatal miscarriage; July 8th - Edward Wiliams and Shelley are drowned in the Gulf of Spezia; August 16th - Shelley's body is cremated at Via Reggi.

1823

In February Sir Timothy Shelley writes Byron to offer guardianship for Percy Florence, Mary refuses; Valperga is published in February; July(?) - Mary writes poem "The Choice;" in August Mary returns to England.

1824

April 19th - Byron dies in Greece; sometime post June 1 Shelley's posthumous poems are published.

1826

In February The Last Man is published; Charles Shelley dies on September 14th, Percy Florence becomes heir to the title.

1828

Mary is in Paris from April to May

1829

June to January (1830) assists Cyrus Redding with publication of the Paris Galignani of Shelley's poems.

1830

Perkin Warbeck is published.

1831

In November Frankenstein is published in revised edition with author's introduction

1832

September 24th - Percy Florence enters Harrow

1835

Lodore is published in March

1836

Godwin dies on April 7th

1837

Falkner is published; Percy Florence enters Trinity College, Cambridge

1838

c. August Sir Timothy Shelley permits Mary to plan on publishing Shelley's posthumous works. Sir Timothy Shelley had previously prevented Mary from doing so threatening her with lack of financial assistance. Any work she had done before on Shelley was stopped.

1839

January - periods of severe illness begin for Mary; Mary's editions of Shelley's poetry and prose, Poetical Works, Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments is published.

1840

June - January (1841) Mary tours the continent with Percy Florence and his friends

1841

Percy Florence graduates from Trinity College

1842

Second tour of the continent with Percy Florence and friends

1844

Rambles in Germany and Italy, 2 volumes, publishd; Sir Timothy Shelley dies, Percy Florence inherits title and estate.

1848

June 22nd - Sir Percy Florence marries Jane St. John

1851

February 1 - Mary Shelley dies, on February 8th she is buried in St. Peter's Churchyard, Bournemouth.

Introduction: Romanticism and Mary Shelley, The Person and Writer

In her fiction Mary Shelley self-consciously confronted and explored the Romantic paradox, the tension and contradiction between the two Romantic ideals of genius and fellowship. Mary Shelley's works reveal that she was either Romanticism's greatest critic or the greatest Romantic, perhaps depending on one's definition of Romantic.

Neoclassical standards most often judged poetry according to how it upheld the conventions of the time. Genius was not associated with originality, and nature was understood in objective terms. In the transition from Neoclassical aesthetics to Romanticism the criteria for judging poetry changed. The concept of nature was radically re-defined and genius became understood as originality and the ability to create from nature. Society was organized according to the Great Chain of Being and cultural standards and conventions were established and upheld by the aristocracy. "Fellowship" as it would be understood in Romantic terms originates with Rousseau's political theory.

Romanticism was dominated by the poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, Byron, and Keats. Though these poets sought to achieve the ideals of genius and fellowship, they were ultimately unable to reconcile the contradiction inherent in the paradox. As the poets promoted these ideals it became increasingly obvious that evolving definitions of

genius and fellowship made these very ideals incompatible. While fellowship was infused with Rousseau's political principles, genius suggested moral superiority. Though "fellowship" and "genius" virtually contradicted each other, the Romantics did not seek for or believe in the existence of a potential alternative to replace or alleviate the struggle with this unreconcilable conflict. Thus, genius and fellowship were often manifest separately in the works and/or lives of these poets.

The "man among men" was also a man of higher sensibility, the "legislator and prophet of the world" was also a democrat even sometimes an anarchist. The self exiled died fighting for his brothers' independence. Manfred willingly goes to his death because "Tis not so difficult to die [Old Man]," (Byron vol IV 102) and we suppose that death, at least, relieves him of the agony of his isolated genius at the cost of the loss of fellowship, human companionship, and love. Actual death is more of a consolation than death-in-life, the condition which develops in Manfred's case when he cannot remain the isolated genius anymore yet does not have recourse to fellowship or love to restructure his life.

In two of Mary Shelley's works, Frankenstein and The Last Man, she consciously challenged the incompatibility and the irreconcilability of the Romantic ideals of genius and fellowship. Ultimately she acknowledges the inherent

contradiction which makes the system unrealizable; no man should be an island unto himself, but, alas he is. Though Mary Shelley was born into and nourished by the politics and ethics of Romanticism, she recognized that the cost of attaining some of those goals negates others.

Mary Shelley's use of her fiction as penetrating commentary on the ideals of the age in which she lived foreshadows the marriage of creativity and criticism which would characterize the later Modernist and Realist literatures. Mary Shelley should not be judged only by the criteria which scholars have applied to Romantic literature because she was not a Romantic artist in the mold of Shelley and others. Her work is distinctive, as is her vision. She adhered to her own system. She was not the prophet, legislator, or man among men, yet, perhaps she was the greatest Romantic of all, the most insightful and perceptive.

This analysis focuses on some influences which bear on Mary Shelley's preoccupations, then briefly clarifies the roots of the concepts "genius" and "fellowship" because these concepts signify the greater transitions which are manifest in Romanticism. The core discussion will consist of two parts: first, how the Romantic "paradox" can be recognized in selected and significant Romantic works and secondly Mary Shelley's works Frankenstein and The Last Man as her attempts to work through this paradox.

Frankenstein has been a central focus in Mary Shelley

and Romantic scholarship. However, Mary Shelley's vision was not limited to Frankenstein alone. Robert Ryan suggests that Frankenstein was part of Mary's search for an alternative to Godwinism (154). I suggest that Mary Shelley's search was just beginning in Frankenstein. The Last Man is a later and important step in an evolution from Frankenstein.

Mary Shelley's experiences, preoccupations, and the influences that worked upon her informed her works; therefore, our knowledge of these forces and events should inform our readings of her works as well as enhance our understanding of the place that Mary Shelley occupies in literary history.

Mary Shelley (1797-1851) has traditionally been judged according to three dominant facts of her life: she is the child of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, the widow of Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the author of Frankenstein one of the central literary achievements of her age. However, Mary Shelley deserves recognition on her own merit. Above and beyond Frankenstein she wrote five other novels, all infused with the theme of the creation of a social order based on love, reciprocity with nature, and education, rather than on power and domination: Valperga (1823), an historical novel which argues for democratic governance and individual (female) valor; The Last Man (1826), an apocalyptic novel which interweaves personal and political

struggle; Perkin Warbeck (1830), another historical novel following the premise of Valperga; Lodore (1835) and Falkner (1837), both domestic novels about family conflicts resolved through the actions of young women (Bennett and Robinson 3). In addition she wrote one novella: Matilda (1819, pub. 1954) about incestous love between a father and daughter; and two travel books: Six Weeks Tour (1817) and Rambles in Germany and Italy (1844); two mythological dramas: Prosperine (1820, pub. 1832) and Midas (1820, pub. 1922); five volumes of Lives (1835-9) for Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopedia; and more than two dozen short stories, essays, translations, reviews (Bennet, vol.1, xi). Shortly after Shelley's death she wrote a poem entitled "The Choice," in which she lamented failing Percy during his lifetime. [William Walling has reprinted this poem on page 298 of his book Mary Shelley.] She also edited several posthumous editions of Shelley's poems, works, letters, and essays (xi). There are several collections of her letters which are now available as well as a growing body of Mary Shelley scholarship.

Much of Mary's life was fraught with tragedy. The years following Shelley's death were particularly difficult. But, though his death threw Mary into a struggle to provide for herself and her child and to maintain her writing, she did not succumb to the pressures weighing her down. Though none of her works following Frankenstein achieved the same public acclaim, she was actively writing until her death in 1851.

Mary's exposure from childhood to the great thinkers and activists of the period alerted her firsthand to the significant and central issues of the day and, thereby, enhanced her perception of the plight of the human spirit. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was the daughter of two of the leading figures of the late 1700's who contributed to efforts to reshape Britain as it developed from an agrarian society to an industrialized and technological one (Bennett and Robinson 5). Though she never met her mother in life, Mary came to know her mother through Godwin and through Wollstonecraft's works. Mary revered her mother whose independence and political and social views would influence her daughter throughout her life.

The humanism which Mary Wollstonecraft espoused in her works was echoed in her daughter's concern for social reform. Frankenstein's monster cries to be treated equally. Yet though he becomes educated, he is still incomplete.

> the most perfect education . . . is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart . . . to enable the individual to attain . . . virtue as will render it independent [and] free in a physical, moral, and civil sense.
>
> (Wollstonecraft 17, 281)

The intellectual companionship which the monster seeks needs to be granted him in order for him to be complete. Complete

or well-rounded development of the individual was a central concern for Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter.

> That intimacy from which tenderness should flow, will not, cannot subsist between the vicious. (280)

Mary's childhood household was in and of itself a political education. After Mary Wollstonecraft's death Godwin remarried to Mrs. Jane Clairmont. At its maximum the household included Mary herself; Fanny Imlay, Wollstonecraft's first and illegitimate daughter; a second stepsister, Jane (Claire) Clairmont; a step-brother; and William Jr., the son of Godwin and Jane Clairmont. Under Godwin's tutelage Mary was exposed to his library, public lectures, and conversations about politics,literature, and philosophy by writers such as Coleridge, Hazlitt, Holcroft, and Charles Lamb. Mary's first work, Mounseer Nongtongpaw, or The Discoveries of John Bull in a Trip to Paris, was published when she was 11 through her father and step-mother's firm. This work sold enough for three subsequent editions (Bennet and Robinson 6).

Mary was profoundly influenced by her father's literary themes. Caleb Williams and Frankenstein both illustrate "the darker side of corrupt social systems in warning of the need to develop new, egalitarian values" (7). Mary was also influenced by her father's work habits--"a life long pattern of reading and writing and intensive historical research" (7). Influenced as she was by her heritage, Mary, like her

mother, was independent and reshaped her intellectual upbringing according to her own intellect, experiences, and visions. The theme of the pathos of criminality seen as the consequence of social corruption occurs throughout Mary Shelley's works. In addition the theme of the futility of aspiration because of the human cost is also a characteristic of her works. William Walling sees Paradise Lost, Political Justice, and Caleb Williams as influential in Mary's use of these themes (Walling 48-9). Mary herself described her motivation for Frankenstein as an "obligation to think of a story which would speak of [the] mysterious fears of our nature" (Frankenstein xxiii).

Percy Bysshe Shelley brought to Mary the conviction that love, not force, was the only valid means of restructuring the life of the individual and society. Mary's own conviction of this principle was fundamental to her life and writing: "How you philosophize about love . . . I have as great an opinion as you concerning its exaltedness" (Bennett and Robinson 391). Lionel Verney, the last man, realizes that without this love neither society nor the individual can be revitalized:

> he is doomed to spend his remaining days- and months, and years- moving from the ruins of one civilization to the ruins of another, ceaselessly seeking but never finding some other isolated human life with whom to share the universe.
>
> (Luke xviii)

Also, Mary and Percy's support of and concern for political liberty was not only directed to England and France, but focused on Greece. [The Shelley's interest in political liberty is the subject of Charles Robinson's article "A New Letter of 5 April 1821" published in the Keats-Shelley Review 31 (1980): (52-56).] Mary's defiance of conventions, anti-monarchism, and her belief in the ability of the individual to transform society reveal her sympathy for the political libertism of the day.

Charles Robinson suggests that Mary should be viewed as a transitional writer because of the development of her style as well as the form of her short stories (Robinson xiv). Her formalized diction and syntactical style are reminiscent of the writing of the 18th century, yet she avoids the often didactic moralizing which characterizes much 18th century narrative (xv). While Mary subordinated moral to theme and character, she maintained that "[fiction] must never divest itself of a certain idealism, which forms its chief beauty" (xv). She sought to teach the human heart either by showing "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence or . . . by showing the effects of moral weakness" (xv). Her character studies "'exalt and soften' human sorrow" (xv). Her sometimes lofty form may still recall Neoclassicism, as far as Robinson seems to imply; but her perspective and sympathies more closely prefigure the Dickensonian sensibility.

Textual analysis supports the probability that Mary is

more than speaking to the heart, but, in fact, critiquing the heart, the Romantic heart. As we will see in Frankenstein and The Last Man the theme of human isolation, "the ineluctable separateness of the individual being" (Luke vii), represents the inevitable consequence of the failure to reconcile genius and fellowship.

Mary Shelley, in effect, critiques, denies, and transcends the vision in which she participated.

for with this frame of mine was wrench'd/
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale,
And then it set me free.
Since then, at an uncertain hour,
that agony returns;
And till my ghostly tale is told
This heart within me burns.

(Coleridge 66)

Chapter 1: The Roots of the Vision of Genius and Fellowship

The intellectual, aesthetic, and political currents of the late 18th and early 19th centuries are not necessarily inconsistent with each other in so far as both aesthetic and political revolution characterizes much of Romanticism. However, when aesthetic liberty and political activism become manifest in the Romantic ideals of genius and fellowship they can and do contradict each other. As these concepts become more fully elaborated they go so far as to negate each other. The cost of this negation, that is achieving one ideal at the expense of another, is what Mary Shelley was exploring through her novels, in particular Frankenstein and The Last Man.

Inability to unify these ideals, genius and fellowship, results most directly from their different grounding. Generally speaking these concepts have their basic foundations in the decline of Neoclassicism. However, while genius can be traced most immediately to the breakdown of Neoclassical aesthetics, fellowship is an ideal more particular to Romanticism itself. "Fellowship" evolves from Roussean doctrine and is, hence, political in orientation rather than aesthetic.

The breakdown of Neoclassical aesthetics can be largely attributed to the 17th century Quarrel of the Ancients and

the Moderns. The Modern perspective challenged reverence to the authority of Classical heritage, the crux of Neoclassical aesthetics. The Moderns argued that contemporary poets could and should transcend the limitations that reverence to Classicism was imposing on their creative genius. Though the "Quarrel" was never fully resolved it left a significant mark on aesthetic philosophy because the Moderns promoted and prioritized originality and creativity over obedience to traditional poetic conventions.

In the later half of the 18th century the argument was revived, but this time in the context of attempting to surpass the boundaries of the mimetic paradigm, the foundation of artistic theory for Neoclassicism, while maintaining the authority of mimesis. (For a more complete explanation of this phenomenon see Terryl Givens' "Blind Men and Hieroglyphs: The Collapse of Mimesis," European Romantic Review 2.1 (1991).) Edward Young's 1759 "Conjectures on Original Composition to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison" was a significant attempt to work through the paradox that aesthetics was confronting, the tension between mimesis and creativity. Through his treatise, Edward Young became one of the first to introduce the Romantic preoccupation with genius.

Young foreshadowed Romantic ideologies by recognizing that to be endowed with genius sets one above the common man:

> Learning we thank, genius we revere; that gives us pleasure, this gives us rapture; that informs,

> this inspires, and is itself inspired; for genius is from heaven, learning from man: this sets us above the low and illiterate; that, above the learned and polite. Learning is borrowed knowledge; genius is knowledge innate, and quite our own. (28)

Young also promoted genius as original composition, "genius can set us right in composition without the rules of the learned" (28).

Furthermore, by exploring and reconciling seemingly irreconcilable options within aesthetics, namely imitation vs. originality, Young simultaneously transcended obedience to Classical authority and introduced new concepts of what being true to nature really means. By shifting emphasis from formulaic imitation, Neoclassicism, to subjective communion with nature and freedom for personal idiosyncratic expression, Young's contribution to the debate over mimesis inaugurated the Romantic concepts of genius and experience of nature.

> [Nature] brings us into the world all originals: no two faces, no two minds, are just alike; but all bear nature's evident mark of separation on them . . . Imitation . . . blots out nature's mark of separation, cancels her kind intention, destroys all mental individuality. (29)

Young, therefore, opened the field of aesthetics to subjective perception and expression and contributed to a

series of aesthetic developments which would directly influence the evolution of Romanticism.

In Young's "Conjectures" we find the beginnings of the condition of the isolated Romantic genius. However, it was Rousseau, not Young, who recognized the potential paradox of this figure trying to situate himself/herself in society. Rousseau realized this paradox because of his political and cultural theories. Thus, it is in Rousseau that we uncover both the origins of "fellowship" and the origins of the tensions between the Romantic ideals of fellowship and genius.

The concept of fellowship can be traced to Rousseau's social contract, "the most sacred of contracts," as discussed in Reveries (78). At its bare minimum this contract was simply that relationship which exists "between the benefactor and beneficiary" (78). The conditions of such a contract were not explicit, but, rather, "they are the natural effects of the relationship which has just been set up between them" (78 - emphasis mine). Most simply a social contract is fellowship between men so long as one "partner" is capable of bestowing charity and the other worthy of receiving kindness. The criteria for determining these qualifications are, among others, humanitarianism, respect, need, and an inherent duty to one's fellow man.

Rousseau's ideal of fellowship is fully embodied in the principles which make for a just society to which the origins of the French Revolution can be attributed, Liberty,

Equality, Fraternity. The social contract forms the basis for acting upon and in accordance with these principles. While liberty and equality promote individual freedom, it is fraternity which represents the spirit of fellowship. Rousseau's social contract ultimately becomes his attempt to resolve the conflicting claims of solitude and fellowship: "we must choose between creating a man [noble savage/genius] or a citizen [fellowship], for one cannot create both at the same time" (France 19). Herein lies the recognition of the Romantic paradox of trying to attain genius while striving for fellowship.

Rousseau understood both the freedom of solitude, "when I am completely myself ... to be what nature willed" (Rousseau 12), and the need for society. The very fact that he wrote several autobiographies in which he celebrated his isolation and then published them indicates a need to be heard, to be received by society. His life then becomes a symbol of the irreconcilability of solitude/isolation and fellowship. His tragedy, like the Romantics, is that he felt compelled to choose one ideal at the cost of the other.

> As long as all men were my brothers,
> I made plans of earthly felicity . . .
> the idea of individual happiness never touched
> my heart . . . until I saw my own
> brothers seeking theirs only in my misery
> misery . . . then it became necessary to flee
> . . . the most desolate solitude seems
> preferable to the society of wicked men. (95)

Rousseau, like the Romantics, did not seek for or believe in an alternative to the irreconcilable conflict. The figure he presented to the world was not unlike that which the Romantics would present. In fact he was the Byronic anti-hero, "the man and all his contradictions" (France 7), before Byron.

Rousseau was one of, if not the, most influential figure in the late 18th century. He fathered the French Revolution, and he fostered the political and social views which would be adopted and further elaborated by, among others, Paine, Wollstonecraft, and Godwin. These individuals would, as we know, be profoundly influential in directing the Romantic political and social perspectives.

The tensions inherent in the paradox of Romanticism were recognized early on by the first Romantics, the German artists and thinkers who formed the close knit group centered around the Schlegel brothers, particularly Friederich. As these men, the contributing members of Das Antheneum, came together to publicize their theories, so they came together in their personal lives. Motivated by a fear of succumbing to the isolation and nihilism of genius, they formed a close friendship in order to keep love in their lives. They then drew on their lives to support their aesthetic theories.

> Romantic literature is in the arts
> . . . what society and sociability,
> friendship, and love are in life. (175)

Perhaps this group forewarned their contemporaries and later poets when they proclaimed:

> The Romantic kind of poetry recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. (175)

Before Romanticism proper fully emerged it was already founded upon a relationship between two ideals that would always be unachievable.

Chapter 2: The Romantic Poets Bound

When considering the Romantic movement it may be ironic to entitle a chapter "the Poets Bound" because certainly the voice of Romanticism, varied as it is at times, is unbound from, among other things, the restraints of the preceeding era, Neoclassicism. And certainly the Romantic poets unbound many themes from their traditional arenas, such as Prometheus, Faust, and Don Juan. Resulting in large part from the radical departure of Sturm und Drang from Neoclassical conventions and aesthetics, the Romantic writers were able to develop "new modes of organizing experience, new ways of seeing the outer world,and a new set of relations of the individual to [the self] and to nature, to history, and to fellow [individuals]" (Abrams,NS,14). The dissolution of the Great Chain of Being paradigm is explained by Abrams, for example, as a movement from Christian supernaturalism to agnostic humanism (124). Abrams also agrees that as much as the Romantics were liberated from tradition they "undertook to save traditional concepts, schemes, and values" (13). The Romantic reformulation found its place in what Abrams and many after him call secular religion.

The Romantic writers were indeed bound to their own tradition and visions, which were often limiting. Adherence to Blake's belief that "I must create a [my own] system or be enslaved by another man's" (442) was restrictive and

solipsistic in and of itself. Such a self-construction allows little room for personal or spiritual development by implying that since enslavement is inevitable it is better to be enslaved by your own system. Such a construct also stands in opposition to Percy Shelley's own formulation of the relationship between poetry and imagination, that of poetry enabling moral good by encouraging empathy by using one's imagination. However, artistic theories were not often practiced. The Romantics adhered to Shelley's formulation only in so far as it applied to their roles as poet-geniuses, their professional lives, not as it applied to their personal lives. If they acted in accordance with Shelley's formulation they would not have enslaved themselves in a vision based on contradictory ideals. The Romantics defined the poet-man in such a light that it unconsciously, and at times perhaps consciously, deterred them from descending the pinnacle they bound themselves to.

In the Romantic tradition the "conviction that poetry at its best should be the trumpet of a prophecy, awakening the sleeping souls of mankind to the beauties of creation in a moral universe" (Roston 195) opposes the fact that poetry has become "to a large extent the manifestation of emotion dynamics and conflicts [within] the artist's internal world" (Schapiro ix). These conflicts, internal versus external, become manifest in the paradox of genius and fellowship. External conflict would, of course, be situated in the context of fellowship, outwardly directed concerns; while,

internal conflict is fully manifest in the isolated genius. There are other dichotomies which simultaneously symbolize the paradox and are manifest in it. Romantic poetry is, thus, intensely personal and externally oriented.

> [It] betrays deep emotional conflict . . . rebellious opposition and revolutionary zeal . . . deep-rooted conflicts . . . also linked to essential conflicts dominating [the] political and social life of their age. (Schapiro xi)

Shortly after the Schlegel's works, William Wordsworth started Preface to the Lyrical Ballads in which he defined the new poetry and the role of the poet. Wordsworth, with unabashed egotism and often consistent inconsistency, declared the poet to be "a man speaking to men," "a translator" but one "chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel ... a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings" (393).

Since poets write for men they must, according to Wordsworth,"express [themselves] as other men express themselves" (397). However, Wordsworth implies that the poet's responsibility is to enlighten his readers, therefore he must necessarily stand above his readers.

> The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited . . . and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and

> dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability . . . to endeavor to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which . . . a writer can be engaged. (389)

The poet's greatness thus lies in the fact that though he is a man, he is "endowed with more lively sensibility,more enthusiasm and tenderness . . . greater knowledge . . . more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind" (393). However, Wordsworth also attempts to temper his glorification of the poet by asserting that "these thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men" (397). Furthermore, he claims that the poet's employment is mechanical compared to the freedom and power of the real actions and sufferings (393). In other words, Wordsworth asserts that the experience of the poet when reproducing "real actions and sufferings" is mechanical compared to the original experience.

Wordsworth is caught in his paradoxical definition of the poet. Ultimately his self-definition comes from being not a man, but a prophet. He feels that he has been called like a biblical prophet.

> The memory of one particular hour/ . . .
> I made no vows, but vows/ Were then made
> for me; bond unknown to me/ Was given, that
> I should be . . ./ A dedicated Spirit. On

I walked/ In thankful blessedness, which
yet survives. ("The "Prelude" 88)

As Abrams recognized this feeling "derives directly from the biblical consecration of poetry to a diviner purpose." The poet is then truly elevated above common man.

Prophet though Wordsworth may be, he was not immune to recognizing the paradox of the isolated genius. In the juxtaposition of youth and age, Wordsworth saw the paradox of the pinnacled genius. For instance, in "Anecdote for Fathers" the poet, like the old man looking back on life, enjoys certain insight yet is often at a loss to answer simple riddles.

O dearest, dearest boy! my heart/
For better lore would seldom yearn,/
Could I but teach the hundreth part/
Of what from thee I learn. (314)

And in "We are Seven," the old man inhabits a realm obviously detached from the innocence of youth. The symbolism of the age:youth juxtaposition is further elaborated in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." Here Wordsworth explores the condition of isolation brought on by the passing of years. He develops the concept of separate realms of youth and age. In the transition from one state to the next the innocence and spiritual purity of youth, "the visionary gleam," is usurped by the isolation and wisdom of age, "the philosophic mind."

Thou little child, yet glorious in the

might/ Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's
height;/ Why with such earnest pains dost thou
provoke/ The years to bring the inevitable
yoke,/ Thus blindly with thy blessedness
at strife?/ Full soon thy Soul shall have her
earthly freight,/ And custom lie upon thee
with a weight,/ Heavy as frost and deep
almost as life. (527)

Wordsworth recognizes love as the answer to isolation, but sees that love is often inaccesible, as suggested in "The Fountain:"

'And, Matthew, for thy children dead/
I'll be a son to thee!'/ At this he
grasped my hand, and said,/ 'Alas!
that cannot be.' (385)

Also in "Lines Written in Early Spring" Wordsworth laments the desperation of man's condition. The despondency is the discord that mankind has fostered amongst itself. In nature Wordsworth perceives a harmony, "a thousand blended notes," which represents the state man should establish:

"To her fair works did nature link/
the human soul that through me ran;/
And much it grieved my heart to think/
What man has made of man." (312)

In nature Wordsworth celebrates harmony. By contrasting "man's condition" to "nature's state," Wordsworth asserts that the discord of man's condition is partly the lack of

harmony. The lack of harmony is caused by isolation which prevents any realization of fellowship.

> If this belief from heaven be sent,/
> If such be Nature's holy plan,/ Have
> I not reason to lament/ What man has
> made of man? (312)

In Wordsworth we can clearly discern the paradoxes which characterize Romanticism. Isolation, as a condition of genius, symbolized by the contrast of youth and age and fellowship, an inherent human need, become concerns for the Romanticist. Yet Wordsworth finds no hope of reconciling the incompatibility or unconnectedness of the two.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in Biographia Literaria, expands upon the value of the poet as put forth by Wordsworth and also further emphasizes the relationship of art and life which the Schlegels and their collaborators recognized. The poet's judgement, infused with "The Vision and the faculty divine" (pt. 2, pg. 60), will "awake and steady self-possession" (17). Poetic genius, by unveiling the film of familiarity which deadens our senses, will release us from the bondage of having "eyes, [that] see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand" (7). The mission of the poet is then to free man, humankind, from a life of falsehood and blindness because "truth operative," that is alive, "is the mistress of poets" (127).

The poet then can hardly be merely mortal if his

mission is one of guidance and/or prophecy. The poet is then one who has greater sensibility and depth since he collaborates only with his muse and thus becomes a recipient of greater messages which must be passed on.

> His muse . . . Makes audible a linked
> lay of truth,/ of truth profound a sweet
> continuous lay,/ Not learnt, but native,
> her own natural notes! (127)

Yet, for all the glory that it seems should be due a figure of such import as the poet, the message bearer of Coleridge's works is not among the host of angels, but, rather, is a tragic isolated often unheeded spirit. For example, in "Christabel" though "that Saints will aid if men will call," it is not the guardian spirit who prevails, but the demon.

> Off, woman, off! This hour is mine-/
> Though thou her guardian spirit be,/
> Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.
> (68)

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge truelly portrays the paradox of the Romantic ideal. In this poem the message is delivered and the lesson learned. The mariner is both the conduit of knowledge and a symbol of the condition of isolation. Just as Wordsworth was the prophet isolated by insight, so the mariner is the prophet isolated by his condition.

The mariner, like Frankenstein, "had done a hellish

thing,/ and it would work 'em woe" (61). Though the mariner had "looked to heaven, and tried to pray," Christianity's solution to alienation, "A wicked whisper came, and made/ [his] heart as dry as dust" (62). Neither the mariner's nor Frankenstein's reconciliation would come through Christianity. Mary Shelley, as Robert Ryan suggests, did not find in Christianity "a system of belief and consolation adequate to her own needs and those of society at large" (Ryan 154). Mary Shelley does present the value of Christianity in Frankenstein, but as socio-cultural, not theological. Therefore, in terms of what the monster himself embodies, Christianity may be representative of fellowship in so far as when Christian sympathies are disregarded, as in Frankenstein's case, then unchristian behavior is the result, as in the monster's case. With a companion the monster will "be harmless and free from the misery [he feels] . . . for [he] shall meet with sympathy" (M. Shelley, Frank., 126). Frankenstein meets with sympathy in Walton and though Walton can not act in the capacity of a reedming God, perhaps as a companion he can relieve Frankenstein of some of his agony. Coleridge also suggests that temporary redemption is achieved by the mariner upon deliverance of his message.

> That moment that his face I see,/
> I know the man that must hear me:/
> To him my tale I teach.
>
> (Coleridge 66)

The lesson is learned, for the wedding guest

Went like one that hath been stunned,/
And is of sense forlorn:/
A sadder and a wiser man,/ He rose
the morrow morn. (66)

Mary Shelley draws the same relationship between Frankenstein and Captain Walton, whom Frankenstein perceives immediately must be the recipient of his tale.

You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as
I once did . . . When I reflect . . .
I imagine that you may deduce an apt
moral from my tale. (M. Shelley, Frank, 23)

Frankenstein, still a "stranger" to Walton at this time, depicts the "messenger" which Coleridge has identified as one imbued with poetic genius and whom Wordsworth sees as able to enlighten his fellow beings.

We are unfashioned creatures, but half
made up, if one wiser, better, dearer
than ourselves . . . do not lend his
aid to perfectionate our weak and faulty
natures. (22)

Like the mariner, Frankenstein may receive partial alleviation from his agony for having prevented Walton from pursueing the same criminal (Romantic?) course. The lesson learned, like the wedding guest's, is not always a pleasant truth.

My tears flow; my mind is
overshadowed by a cloud of dissappointment.
But I journey towards England, and I may

there find consolation. (188)

Though Christianity poses an attempted solution to the breakdown of fellowship it is insufficient for Romanticism. Christianity will not work because it has no room for genius. Christianity represents an abandonment of the self (genius) for fellowship.

Of particular interest as regards the Romantic ideal is Coleridge's concept of the Pantisocracy. Pantisocracy was supposed to be a utopian commune made up of the writers and their families. Though the project fell through, it is still an important example of fellowship as a potent ideal in Romanticism. The "commune" represents an attempt to create an environment where the poetic genius could be nourished in an arena of love and fellowship:

> O'er the ocean swell/ sublime of
> of Hope, I seek the cottag'd dell/ Where
> Virtue calm with careless step may
> stray,/ And dancing to the moonlight
> roundelay,/ The wizard Passions weave
> an holy spell. (Coleridge, "Pantiscocracy," 37-9)

In the poem, virtue and passions co-relate to characterize a freedom from constraints on poetic genius--freedom, one supposes, from the political and social oppressions the Romantics and their immediate predecessors sought reforms for. For example, this freedom is the motivating factor in what Harold Bloom identifies as the Prometheus stage: "deep involvement in political, social and

literary revolutions . . . attack[s] on institutional orthodoxies" (Bloom, "TIQR," 10)).

Virtue then also echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's ideals of virtue as nourishment by education which enables individuals to attain their "own-ness," or rather to truly become individuals. Virtue becomes an agent in the process which Carl Jung explains as individuation, the process of becoming.

> I use the term individuation to denote
> the process by which a person becomes . . .
> a separate, indivisible unity or whole . . .
> it also implies becoming one's own self
> (Jung 395)

In both Frankenstein and The Last Man the characters struggle to make a place for themselves, to be allowed to be themselves. However, they must battle against a world which does not want them and often closes the door on them. In a concept like pantisocracy, the poets have actually voluntarily removed themselves from the world. Mary Shelley, and Mary Wollstonecraft, would not support the actualization of pantisocracy. That is why I liken virtue and reform, as these women defined and applied them, to the thoughts of Carl Jung. An integral part of Jung's concept of individuation, which I believe these women would heartily agree with, is that "individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to oneself" (396). By "individuating" and not removing oneself from the world, one

is more in tune with both the self and other selves and, therefore, better able to function in the world.

The textual examples I have used thus far may seem obvious or self-explanatory, but they are actually indicative of more complex tensions which permeate the dialogue in Romantic works. Other scholars have identified components of the conflict between genius and fellowship. For example, Harold Bloom discusses the Real Man power and the Prometheus power (R & C,10,15). The Real Man stage would be the ultimate isolation of the individual, the furthest point at which the Romantic poet would find himself/herself having irreperably foregone the chance to reconcile the tension and conflicts between his/her ideals and needs. These two powers, Real Man and Prometheus, constitute the internalizing quest within the Romantic aesthetic.

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" the narrator's quest has been brought within the self and its ambiguities (11), whereas a work such as "Pantisocracy" would most certainly represent the promethean stage, "poet-as-hero in the first stage . . . marked by deep involvement in political, social, and literary revolution [etc]" (11). Bloom correctly asserts that the Romantics tried to unite these powers in a dialect of love. Both Percy and Mary Shelley in particular devoted their lives and work to the conviction that love could, or should, be used in an healing capacity.

The tragedy of sacrificing one ideal for another is represented by what Bloom, for example, sees as the pinnacle for the poet hero, the satiation of his quest by internalization. To "satiate' one's quest would be to allow oneself to be consumed by the imaginative or creative forces--to the exclusion of any association with fellowship, or what Bloom identifies as the promethean stage. However, Mary Shelley would refute Bloom's position. The consequences of Bloom's theory would be the poet in extreme isolation. The cost of this isolation is too great according to Mary Shelley's convictions, though it often seems inevitable for the poets themselves. Total submission to imagination seems to be the life-source for the poet-hero's self-realization or individuation. Blake says: "We are our imaginations, and die with them." However, the relationship between imagination and life is as tenacious as the juxtaposition of love and hate or isolation and fellowship or light and dark. In other words, death-in-life occurs if the imagination wanes, but total submersion in the imagination could just as likely cause death, i.e. genius and isolation.

The Schlegels recognized the balance that fellowship provided to the condition of isolation. Frankenstein's warning to Capt. Walton prevented him from transcending the balance into the realm of "genius," and, hence, isolation. Indeed, the ancient mariner endowed the wedding guest with knowledge so that he could perceive his position in the

relationship of "genius" and "fellowship." But it is often the case that this knowledge is undesired. Though it prevents potential solipsism from becoming an actuality, it also brings on the "philosophic mind" and insight, therefore, can cause isolation.

> He went like one that hath been
> stunned,/ And is of sense forlorn:
> A sadder and a wiser man,
> He rose the morrow morn.
>
> (Coleridge 66)

Mary Shelley's fiction serves as a critical conduit between the Romantic ideal and its reality. She is at once a wedding guest, formed by her own understanding and perception of Romanticism's "message," and the ancient mariner to us as wedding guests. Her ability to realize and transfer herself from role to role confirms an assimilation of subjective experience and objective reflection which informs her vision and makes her both a leading Romanticist and its greatest critic.

Chapter 3: .The Voice Unbound, Frankenstein

"L'exercice des plus sublimes vertus
eleve et nourrit le genie"
(Marshall 231)

Mary Shelley explored, challenged, and attempted to reformulate the Romantic paradox of genius and fellowship in a variety of ways. In the two novels, Frankenstein and The Last Man, this paradox is manifest in a series of diverse concepts and contexts. The diversity of Mary Shelley's approaches has enabled her to present not only a critique of the Romantic aesthetic, but also a critique of socio-political currents of her time.

Both of the novels reveal a set of characteristics which constitute facets of the ideals of genius and fellowship. These characteristics, which emerge from a series of themes which figure in both novels, enable us to further understand the paradox in question. Mary Shelley's system shows that in order to create and maintain a balanced aesthetic or political perspective these characteristics cannot operate in a vacuum. The Romantics, on the other hand, explored the incompatibility of their ideals without attempting potential reconciliation. Mary Shelley, however,recognized the need to attempt that reconciliation and suggests a possible resolution of the conflict between genius, often manifest as ambition, and fellowship, the need for intimacy, which will result in a balanced world.

Mary Shelley believed that individual idealism and benevolence can be threatened and destroyed by a social and political system based on absolutist doctrine. However, she also believed that individual idealism,benevolence, and compassion can threaten traditional social and political constructions. Idealism, benevolence, and compassion are some components of "fellowship," they inspire that vision. Yet, "idealism," is a malleable concept. As it relates to genius, idealism can be manifest in self-absorption, self-power, and isolation. What the Romantics viewed as heroic genius in characters like Faust and Manfred, Mary Shelley saw as failed genius and explored in a character like Frankenstein, or, even Raymond.

Exile and alienation are, by far, the predominant signifiers for genius. They are informed by intense personal mission and the presence of internal struggles. Social reform, politics, democracy, public (external) missions, Christianity, and love suggest "fellowship." Through her characters, plots, and sometimes setting, Mary Shelley tests her belief in, critique of,and reformulation of the traditional Romantic perspective.

Frankenstein, the most popular of Mary Shelley's novels, needs little introduction. Set in the 18th century,it is a story of a ship captain, Robert Walton, bound for adventure in the Northern Pole, who pulls a desperate man, Victor Frankenstein, from a small dog sled

which has become stuck on a drifting ice float. Frankenstein is in search of his creation/creature. The novel is Victor's story told to Walton. What this novel is "really about" has been the subject of scholarship and popular cultural myth for many, many years. Sebastian Knowles claims that Frankenstein itself inspired at least 32 films (Knowles 1).

The occasion from which Frankenstein emerged is quite well known, also the subject of several movie pictures, ("The Haunted Summer" and "Gothic" are two). However, specifics of the event often differ as scholars rely on varied accounts of who participated in the contest and also who participated in the conversation which Mary Shelley in part attributes her idea to. In the author's introduction to Frankenstein, written in 1831, Mary counts four present the evening Byron suggested "we will each write a ghost story" (xi). The four Mary accounts for are herself, Byron, Shelley, and Byron's doctor/companion, John Polidori. Shelley, in the preface to the novel, accounts for only three participants, himself, Byron, and Mary. Furthermore, as of the writing of the preface, September 1817, Shelley does not credit any of the participants, excepting Mary, as having completed their work (xiv), whereas Mary at least confirmed that Byron printed a fragment of his story at the end of "Mazeppa" (ix) and John Polidori also completed a work.

Mary's letters around the time of the writing and

publication of Frankenstein contain only indirect allusions to the work: December 1816 she records having completed chapter 4 (Bennet vol. 1, 22); William Walling cites an entry in Mary's journal of August 21, 1816 that she and Shelley had a conference about her story (32); other allusions are to publication proofs (Bennet 42) and a letter written to Sir Walter Scott thanking him for his favourable review and denying Percy's authorship (Bennet 71).

Polidori wrote The Vampyre, which some scholars speculate was influenced by Byron's fragment (Bleiler xxxvi). The fact that Mary's story is so different from both Polidori'sand Byron's and that all these stories presumably originated from the same events is further testimony that Mary's story is not an outgrowth, but, a critique of the tradition. Polidori drew from a tradition of vampire type folklore and, incidentally, heavily influenced the future tradition of vampirism (Bleiler 261). Polidori's The Vampyre is consistent with the gothic tradition of that period. Though Frankenstein is often studied and classified as a gothic it is much more. While traditional gothic novels,such as Castle of Otranto and The Monk, rely on spine tingling horror and the perversity of human inclination, Frankenstein transcends sheer gothic horror into the realm of psychological terror and the deep recesses of the human soul. Frankenstein diverges from the gothic particularly because of its sophistication. Earlier gothic, such as Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto and

Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho, and even spoofs of gothic, such as Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey and Thomas Love Peacock's Nightmare Abbey, relied on supernatural forces as a source of horror whereas in Frankenstein the horror is mankind. Perhaps of all the earlier gothic Matthew Lewis' The Monk comes closest to probing the horror within our souls, yet it still depends on supernatural special effects. The terror in Frankenstein is not unlike that experienced by Kurtz in Heart of Darkness as he cries "The Horror! The Horror!" And, indeed, the horror embodied by Frankenstein's monster perhaps reflects the horror of our own society. The monster depended only on human kindness, humanitarianism, to help alleviate his misery, but, in turn, was cast further from society and deeper into his agony.

There are slightly varied accounts of what exactly generated the story. Attribution rests primarily on a conversation which occurred one of the nights of the Switzerland visit about the nature of the principles of life and the probability of its ever being discovered (M. Shelley, Frank., xxiv). Traditionally it was believed that Shelley and Byron participated in the conversation, but recently it has been suggested that John Polidori and Shelley were the conversers (Bleiler 30). Mary and Percy were reading several ghost stories that summer, including History of the Inconstant Lover and Vathek, and Bleiler suggests that the "insolent desire to penetrate the secrets of heaven" influenced Mary (26).

The novel far transcends the bounds of "gothic" and "horror story." Mary Shelley says in her introduction: "supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (M. Shelley, Frank., xxv). In writing of a story with this in mind, Mary Shelley wrote not only of creation, but existence and destruction. The story of Victor's obsession, clashes between creator and created, the ensuing search and tragic series of events all bring to light the tensions which constitute Romantic ideologies and aesthetics. Mary Shelley invites readers to explore the materials which inspired her.

> Invention . . . does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must . . . be afforded: [they] can give form to dark, shapeless substances. (xxiv)

Mary Shelley's "dark, shapeless substances" are the ideologies and aesthetics of Romanticism, particularly the tensions and paradoxes which she manifest in them.

The "true story" of the novel Frankenstein lies not in Victor Frankenstein's story, but in Robert Walton's record of Victor's story and in what transpires while Walton in making the record. The ingenious narrative structure of the novel makes it quite easy for the reader to be so drawn into Frankenstein's story that we forget about the greater

context. The tripartite division of the novel, a story within a story within a story parallels the successive re-presentative narratives: the monster re-presented by Frankenstein who is in turn re-presented by Walton. The novel opens with a series of letters written by Walton and addressed to his sister, Margaret Saville. Chapters 1 through 11 are narrated by Frankenstein, 11 through 16 by the monster, 17 through the first part of 24 by Frankenstein again, and the concluding section is back to Walton. If attention is not drawn to the structural framework of the novel, readers will not gain full insight into the novel. When we consider that throughout Frankenstein's recitation he has already achieved a "death-in-life" condition, the novel's power is that much more effective. The fact that Mary Shelley did not interrupt the novel at any point in Frankenstein's or the monster's narration also lends effectiveness to the power and flow of the novel. She and Walton remain outside of, and hence critics of, one layer of theme. They both provide a sense of objective reflection on the tension between Frankenstein and the monster. Furthermore, by utilizing the epistolary form for Walton's reflections Mary Shelley remains as fully outside of her text as we, the readers, thereby making the text an even more effective critical reflection. While the body of the novel, Victor and the monster's narration, is important because it defines the relationship between these two characters, it is in Walton's narration that Mary Shelley

really brings to light the tensions between the Romantic ideals of genius and fellowship.

The development and significance of the three main characters as they relate to each other is fairly complex because their symbolic signification often changes slightly in different contexts. Ultimately, Walton emerges as the pivotal focus of Mary Shelley's critique of the Romantic paradox. The only character who does not neccessarily "evolve," but she remains constant in her symbolic value, is Walton's sister. Margaret Saville is not a main character, but she is an important catalyst for Walton'sevolution and reconciliation.

Mrs Saville, as Brennan describes her, is the "rational, socially adjusted self" (41). In the wilderness of the artic, where Walton's story takes place, Mrs Saville must be seen as representing one end of the ideological spectrum that Walton is caught in the middle of. Though Mrs Saville may not represent "fellowship" as fully as the Romantics or even Mary Shelley would,she certainly symbolizes fellowship when contrasted to the other end of the spectrum, Frankenstein nd his monster. Mrs Saville represents compassion and love. She is obviously dear to Walton -

> "Save me, that I may again . . .
> testify my gratitude for all your love
> and kindness" (15)
>
> "Heaven bless my beloved sister" (17)

Maragaret Savile fits neatly into an equation that Eugene Stelzig has formulated to represent the "Romantic Problem" of self versus family, as he sees it. I adopt his formula because it further strengthens my own argument by recognizing a tension between these "ideals." Family represent human connectedness which simply signifies fellowship; self is genius, "solitary and homeless Romantic self longing for a higher home" (47). The "problem," Stelzig argues, lies in the romantic imagination which seeks to discover some terms of relationship [with the human family] (47). Wordsworth again comes to mind.

Walton represents the actualization of reconciliation, he will "overcome alienation by breaking out of [the] prison of individual self-conscious" (47). Margaret Saville is important character because she represents the family/society that Walton will return to. Frankenstein, on the other hand, has destroyed his "family,"he is the failed genius. Stelzig's proposal is significant because it contributes to the body of scholarship that interprets Frankenstein as a revealing of Mary's experience of family. This critical approach, the "psychoanalytic-familial" school, does back up the opinion that Mary Shelley viewed isolation as death, solitude (genius) results in death, thereby interaction (fellowship) and, presumably, family are a deliverance from death or the state of isolated genius.

Captain Robert Walton is not a terribly complex character. His needs, wants, and desires are easy to flesh

out. The danger lies in his pursuing ambition at the cost of fellowship. And so, it will become clear as the letters proceed that Frankenstein will play the Ancient Mariner to Walton's wedding quest. In other words, the seeming naivete on Walton's part will soon be dissipated. Walton eventually accepts the limits of adult responsibility. His acceptance of these responsibilities, though disheartening for him, and his obvious, though sometimes fluctuating,compassion for his sister and his men are the means for his reconciliation. The reconciliation is fostered by the understanding that he must return to England and quell the fire Byron speaks of:

> "there is a fire/ And motion of
> the soul, which will not dwell/ In its
> own narrow being, but aspire/ Beyond
> the fitting medium of desire"
>
> (Bloom, After., 212)

However, a distinction must be made between elimanating the spirit of a vision and moderating the consumation of a drive so powerful that it propels the individual, i.e. Frankenstein or Manfred or Faust, into a realm of solitary genius. Walton is given the opportunity to stop short of destroying his bond to fellowship. It is simply in moderating his drive for ambition that he will be able to more fully nourish and understand the relationship between genius and fellowship.

When the novel opens Walton describes the forces which drive his <u>personal</u> mission: "the wind of promise," "region

of beauty and delight," "phenomena of the heavenly bodies," "wondrous powers" . . . (15). These are his "enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear," as well as momentarily suppress his longing for fellowship (16). Walton is able to perceive his vision because he has tasted the realm of genius, so to speak.

> . . . when I perused, . . ., those
> poets whose effusions enhanced my soul
> and lifted it to heaven. I also became
> a poet . . .

Soon enough though Walton also feels the want of companionship.

> I have one want . . . I have no friend
> . . . I desire the company of a man
> . . . I greatly need a friend. (15, 16)

Mary Shelley has immediately introduced the tension between fellowship and genius. In only the second letter we must recognize the crux of the novel - Walton's struggle with this paradox which represents the tension between "genius" and "fellowship." [It is indeed ironic that Walton recognizes himself as romantic: "you may deem me Romantic" (18).] Mary Shelley continually reiterates the paradox by paralleling Walton's desire for ambition (genius), on the one hand, and his need for fellowship, on the other hand. Later in conversation with Frankenstein, Walton laments:

> how gladly I would sacrifice my
> fortune, my existence, my every hope,
> to the furtherance of my enterprise.

> One man's life or death were but a
> small price to pay for the acquirement
> of the knowledge which I sought, for the
> dominion I should acquire and transmit
> over the elemental foes of our race. (21)

Yet, moments later, Walton shares his impassioned desire for companionship:

> I spoke of my desire of finding a friend,
> of my thirst for a more intimate
> sympathy with a fellow mind . . .
> my conviction that a man could boast
> of little happiness who did not enjoy
> this blessing (22 -emphasis mine)

Walton embodies the struggle between what both Frankenstein and his monster symbolize: 1) a man who followed only his genius impulses (to the extent of sacrificing all other ideals), and 2) a being who seeks only the simple pleasure of companionship, who strives to be the recipient of humanitarian (fellowship) impulses.

Walton recognizes Frankenstein as a man with a "double existence." This double existence is partly the paradox between genius and fellowship, however in Frankenstein's case he has transcended the region where resolution would have been possible. Frankenstein recognizes the possibility that Walton can be prevented from making the same horrific mistake. Mary Shelley casts Frankenstein in the role of teacher to Walton. The parallel to the relationship between

the Ancient Mariner and the wedding quest is obvious. Also obvious should be the symbolism of the "teaching"role of Frankenstein to the teaching role in which the Romantic poets perceived themselves. Indeed Walton as already associated the enlightened/visionary state as the poet's state. Furthermore, if Mary Shelley "borrowed" her contemporaries view of themselves as teacher to characterize Frankenstein this may lend credence to the scholarly speculation that Frankenstein could be Mary's personal critique of Percy Shelley. It is speculation, but considering Mary and Percy's relationship perhaps she did cast Shelley as Frankenstein and herself as Walton. Indeed it has also been conjectured that Mary saw herself as the monster to Shelley as Frankenstein. The degree to which this is conjecture or credible interpretation, in light of recent scholarship, will be discussed further in the conclusion. However, it is worth repeating that character symbolic value depends on the context in which the characters are contrasted and juxtaposed.

The purpose of Frankenstein's tale is to warn Walton of the multitude of tragic consequences which may arise as a result of blind ambition, the indulgence of genius.

> You seek for knowledge and
> wisdom, as I once did . . .
> when I reflect that you are
> pursuing the same course . . . I
> imagine that you may deduce an
> apt moral from my tale . . . (23)

Upon concluding his tale, Frankenstein reprimands Walton's curiosity and further urges him to heed Frankenstein's tale as warning: "Peace! Peace! Learn my miseries and do not seek to increase your own!" (181).

Between the beginning of the journey and the end (almost a full year in time), Walton's character undergoes a slow transformation from an internal, isolated, self-absorbed orientation to a more external focus. Though he is by no means an heroic or noble character, and, indeed, still despairs over ending his journey, Walton's character at least displays a greater degree of sensibility to the lives around him and certainly more a greater sense of responsibility.

> The brave fellows whom I have persuaded to be my companions look toward me for aid, but I have none to bestow. There is something terribly appalling in our situation, yet my courage and hopes do not desert me. Yet it is terrible to reflect that the lives of all thee men are endangered through me. If we are lost, my mad schemes are the cause. (183)

Frankenstein is an interesting character when contrasted to Walton. While Frankenstein, for the most part, is a scale by which to gauge Walton's struggle, Frankenstein is also an instigator. Forever bound to the

condition of genius, Frankenstein will not tolerate the sailors request to return home though he continues to urge Walton away from ambition: "Seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition." It is possibly at the point when Frankenstein shows little regard for the condition of the sailors that Walton begins to deffuse his allegiance to his mission for the safety of his crew:

> they entered . . . to make me a requisition which, in justice, I could not refuse. (184 -emphasis mine)

> I had not despaired, nor had I yet conceived the idea of returning if set free. Yet could I, in justice, or even in possibility refuse this demand? (184)

Even having accepted that he must return to England, i.e. society, Walton still continues to demonstrate despair at ending his journey. But he also demonstrates hope that England will help to heal his wounds. The essence of his struggle is captured in his dramatic and impassioned reflections:

> My beloved sister, the sickening failing of your heart-felt expectations, in prospect, more terrible to me than my own death. (183)

> The die is cast; I have consented

> to return if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed . . . While I am wafted towards to England [though] and towards you, I will not despond. (186)
>
> I cannot lead them unwittingly to danger. (186)
>
> I journey towards England, and I may there find consolation. (187)

And though Walton laments that "it requires more philosophy than [he possesses] to bear this injustice with patience," (186) he does bear his responsibility well. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the novel Walton has transferred his values from his drive for ambition to reaching home, companionship with family, and consolation in society. Both Frankenstein, the genius failed, and his creature are dead, destroyed essentially by their own hand. Clearly Mary Shelley demonstrates in Frankenstein that unmoderated genius results in destruction. Walton, on the other hand, prevents his destruction by realizing his priorities. Though reconciliation for Walton does entail a degree of sacrifice, this is not to say that he must put aside all journeying or that his efforts, thus far, will come to naught. Like the wedding quest, Walton "went like one that hath been stunn'd,

And is of sense forlorn, A sadder and a wiser man" (Coleridge 66).

When Frankenstein's recitation commences with chapter 1 we, the readers, take our place alongside Walton in the audience. Frankenstein's story is a story about the development of the genius. Through this part of the novel we learn how it is that Frankenstein arrived at his condition: "thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin" (34).

In the first three chapters of the novel Frankenstein's character is fully established. He is simultaneously a product of the Romantic world view and the Rationalist or Enlightenment perspective (Banerji 100). Frankenstein's "eager desire to learn . . . the secrets of heaven and earth" (31), "to penetrate the secrets of nature" (32), to "pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries" (39) capture the Enlightenment spirit. This rationalist perspective believed that nature and other forces which propelled the world were understandable, explainable, and conquerable. Frankenstein, the scientist,is a character not alien to this state of mind. In fact, his profession developed cultural acceptance during this era.

However, Frankenstein's motivation, temperament, and fascination with ancient philosophy cast a Romantic light on his character. As Frankenstein becomes aware of his

passions, he feels "as if [his] soul were grappling . . . the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of [his] being" (39). As Frankenstein's impulses towards genius begin to consume any sense of fellowship, Frankenstein feels his "internal being in a state of insurrection and turmoil" (39). We are reminded of the madness Faust must have experienced in his mental descent to the (partly physical) state of pinnacled genius. Even Frankenstein's expression seems ironically poetic: "chord after chord was sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose" (39). Finally, in an almost "Everyman-ish" mode Frankenstein describes the force of evil and good at work and his final temptation. Indeed, Frankenstein is cast as a Thel who succombs to curiosity and does <u>not</u> turn back, does <u>not yet</u> recognize the destruction to come.

> the immediate suggestion of the
> guardian angel of my life -
> the last effort . . . to avert the storm
> . . . was a strong effort of the spirit of
> good, but it was ineffectual. Destiny
> was too potent, and her immutable
> laws had decreed my utter and
> terrible destruction. (34)

Frankenstein is the "being - whose desire was to be glorious" and "'twas a foolish quest, the which to gain and keep, he sacrificed all rest". Frankenstein is the symbol Mary Shelley uses for her criticism of "genius." He is what happens when that aspiration overtakes all and when man strives to transcend his own boundaries. Frankenstein is the poet, described in works such as "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," "Biographia Literaria," and Shelley's "Defence," who becomes more than man. And in the very end of his life he comes to understand this and, like the Ancient Mariner, suffers to tell his tale.

> Learn from me . . . how dangerous
> is the acquirement of knowledge and
> how much happier that man is who
> believes his native town to be the
> world, than he who aspires to
> become greater than his nature will
> allow. (M. Shelley, Frank., 44)

In his juxtaposition to the monster, Frankenstein serves both as a symbol of genius aesthetically and as a symbol of the powers that deny fellowship socio-politically. As the monster and scientist are incompatible so to are the ideals of genius and fellowship particularly when the one forces the other into abject submissiveness.

Frankenstein is the promethean absolutism of Romanticism . But, he never does fully recognize his fault and only sees his responsibility to kill the monster rather

than alleviate it's misery. Frankenstein likens himself to victim, one who

> Doth walk in fear and dread,/
> And, having once turned round,
> walks on,/ And turns no more
> his head,/ Because he knows a
> frightful fiend/ Doth close
> behind him tread. (50)

The evil and horrific element is that Frankenstein denies his accountability for his actions. The monster is, after all, an outgrowth of Frankenstein's mind (ambitions), and, hence, is also a symbol of the destructive element in man (Jackson 51).

Recent scholarship on Frankenstein has deliberated on what the monster fully symbolizes as the product of man's mind. The predominant notion is that the monster is the embodiment of Frankenstein's transformation into his destructed neglected self (Jackson 51). Therefore, the monster is the embodiment of denied fellowship. Robert Ryan, expounding on a suggestion by Leslie Tannenbaum, suggests that Mary Shelley actually cast herself as the monster struggling against both Frankenstein, (a composite of Godwinism and Shelleyanism), and against Christianity as the obvious alternative to Godwinsim (Ryan 150-1). It is interesting to posit this interpretation. However, autobiography aside, it is clear that Mary Shelley has pitted the values of "genius" and "fellowship" against each

other. She explores the consequences of the humanitarian monster in a battle against the forces which wish to overpower him.

The monster understands his own motivations and the deeper implications of his values and actions. From learning to admire the virtues of mankind and deprecate the vices (110), the monster learns the injustice of his creator's system:

> I am content to reason with you.
> I am malicious because I am miserable.
> Am I not shunned and hated by all
> mankind? . . . Shall I respect man when
> he contemns [condemns] me? Let
> him live with me in the interchange
> of kindness, and . . . I would
> bestow every benefit . . . tears
> of gratitude . . . But . . . the
> human senses [genius] are
> insurmountable barriers . . . (125)

> Am I to be thought the only criminal
> when all humankind sinned against me?
> (191)

The tragedy of the monster is Frankenstein's lack of accountability towards his creation. All of the monster's expectations and requests are based on qualities of fellowship:

> . . . benevolence towards me, I

> should return [the feelings] . . .
> Let me feel gratitude . . . I do not
> destroy the lamb . . . (126)

Frankenstein never answers the monster on terms of fellowship or compromise. In fact the only character who demonstrates compassion fully towards the monster is Walton.

Walton regards both his duty to his friend and his social obligation to the monster (188):

> my first impulses . . . were now
> suspended by a mixture of
> curiosity and compassion (189)

Walton's sentiments, his compassion to the monster even when reprimanding him, are the rubicon he had to cross to maintain a balance between genius and fellowship.

> Your repentance is now
> superfluous. If you had
> listened to the vice of conscience and
> heeded the stings of remorse
> before . . . (189)

Both the monster and Frankenstein epitomize the death-in-life condition, Frankenstein because he denies fellowship for genius, and the monster because he is denied fellowship. The monster is also denied the ability to choose because his fate is impressed upon him involuntarily - the monster is essentially denied the rights that Mary Wollstonecraft espoused in her Vindication. Walton then emerges as the most human of the three characters. In

Walton Mary Shelley suggests reconciliation through compromise. In Frankenstein Mary Shelley explored the poet's drive, the consequences of which are reflected in the monster. In the monster she seems to be also exploring the obvious alternative to Rationalism and Godwinism which was cristianity. Christianity however turned out to be just as unplausible as the Romantic values inherent in genius. While Walton clearly embraces qualities of genius, he ultimately compromises by placing fellowship as the structural frame-work for his life. In addition, Walton takes responsibility for his actions. He becomes accountable - something most of the Romantic poets denied and Mary Shelley would clearly have known and seen that.

William Coyle defines a realist as one who looks outward at a world (he) never made, and a fantasist as one who looks inward to a world that never was: "the jungle of his own psyche . . . a subjective world of distortion and evasion" (1). Mary Shelley the author of Frankenstein is not creating a realist world. However, the materials which she used to build the world of the novel, to nourish it's jungles, and to emphasize the tensions between its inhabitants came from the world in which Mary Shelley lived. The vision in Frankenstein is informed by Mary Shelley's subjective experience of and objective reflection on her world - a world structured by the ideals of Romanticism and the battles of a changing political, economic, and social

system. In her fiction, Mary Shelley explores the paradoxes inherent in this system. The Last Man is a further step of her exploration. While The Last Man is somewhat less realistic and somewhat more fantastic than Frankenstein, it is yet another complicated look at the paradox of genius and fellowship.

Chapter 4: The Voice Unbound, The Last Man

The Last Man, Mary Shelley's third novel, was published in 1826. Set in the 21st century it is, essentially, the story of the destruction of mankind. More specifically it is Lionel Verney's story, in three volumes, about his life journey and the catastrophic devastation which lead to his becoming the last member of the human race. The novel was not well received in Mary Shelley's time, and would probably draw more interest from contemporary audiences because it treats potential devastating consequences of modern industrial societies and political socio-economic change. It is a difficult and depressing, though profound, read.

In August of 1823 Mary Shelley returned to England from Italy where she had spent the year following Percy Shelley's death. William Walling and Elizabeth Nitchie believe that Mary's sense of loneliness and isolation at this time are crucial to a complete understanding of The Last Man (78). In fact, Walling suggests that Mary's psychological condition is mirrored in the novel (86). Furthermore, he attests that the novel reveals both Mary's "deep bitterness towards [the] common run of humanity" and her desire to commemorate Shelley--in the character of Adrian (95). Hugh Luke, in his introduction to The Last Man, proposes that Mary patterned the novel after her own life. According to Luke's suggestion volume 1 of The Last Man would then reflect Mary's childhood isolation, the end of volume 1 and

beginning of volume 2 her temporary union with Shelley and friends, and volume 3 Mary's intensified isolation as an adult (Luke xvii-iii). Most scholarship regarding The Last Man is written from a biographical-psychoanalytic critical perspective.

Thus, it is difficult to avoid the influence of such a school of thought. Mary Shelley, herself, invites a biographical reading of The Last Man--and in fact of all her works. There is indication in some of her letters and journal entries from the Spring of 1824 that she was very consciously relating her life to a work that would indeed be The Last Man published two years later:

> 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
>
> (Walling 80)

Hugh Luke also cites from letters Mary wrote after the publication of The Last Man which further testify to biographical elements in the novel:

> I have endeavored . . .but how
> inadequately, to give some idea
> of him [Shelley] in my last
> published book - the sketch
> has pleased some of those who
> best loved him-
>
> (Luke xi)

The Last Man is a depressing and perplexing novel and all the more so when the reader is inundated with the biographical implications. However, Mary Shelley's concerns are not unique to her alone. The general themes of the novel share an affinity with Romantic preoccupations with social progress and the condition of the individual, especially the individual's potential isolation. We are reminded of the Wordsworthian solitaire or even of Rousseau. The ultimate subject of the destruction of mankind was fashionable in the early 1800's. In 1806 an anonymous novel was published entitled The Last Man, or Omegarus and Syderia, Byron wrote "Darkness" in 1816, and in the 1820's Thomas Campbell and Thomas Hood both wrote poems entitled "Last Man" (Walling 82).

William Walling suggests that The Last Man as a story of man's aloneness in a vast and unintelligible world is Mary Shelley's exploration of the paradox of modern industrial societies and the ultimate consequences of a "plague of liberty" when no viable social and political system has been designed to replace the traditional structure: "volume 1: England where old hierarchies have broken down, volumes 2 & 3: horrific vision of world from which all social distinctions have vanished and everyman is reduced to lowest common denominator" (Walling 92). But, implicit in Mary Shelley's themes, and in the predominant interpretations, is the probing and challenging of values and an attempt to work through paradox and arrive at

conclusions as to the consequences of a situation in which systems of value have gone awry and man is left to the hands of fate.

The novel is divided into four sections: author's introduction, and volumes 1, 2, and 3. In the introduction Mary Shelley refers to an 1818 visit to Naples, Italy with a companion. She alludes to an episode of finding and attempting to translate some "Leaves of Sibyl" uncovered in the Cavern of the Cumaean Sibyl. Mary Shelley was either alluding to uncovering a prophecy about the future or trying to draw a parallel mood of discovery perhaps to a future individual's discovery of Verney's record:

> the imagination, painter of tempest
> and earthquake, or, worse, the stormy
> and ruin-fraught passions of man,
> softened my real sorrows and endless regrets,
> by clothing these fictitious ones in
> that ideality, which takes the mortal sting
> from pain. (4)

The novel is written as a record of Lionel Verney's experience. It is similar to Frankenstein in that the events which constitute the story have already, for the most part, occurred. This narrative structure enhances the sense of doom which pervades the novel. In addition, Lionel Verney's reflective intercessions, which occur throughout the novel, increase the drama and doom that characterize The Last Man, for example:

> Have any of you, my readers, observed
> the ruins of an anthill immediately
> after it's destruction? (230)
>
> My present feelings are so mingled
> with the past . . . (310)

The cast of characters in the novel is numerous. However, there are five primary characters all loosely based on Mary and Percy's friends: 1) Lionel Verney, associated with Mary herself; 2) his sister, Perdita "who is married to Raymond [Byron] is generally [thought] to be identified with Byron's mistress, Claire Clairmont" though she is also associated with Mary (Luke xiii); 3) Adrian, Earl of Windsor and son of the last king of England [a republic was formed in 2073], is recognized as the character Mary uses to pay tribute to Percy; 4) Idris, sister of Adrian and wife of Verney, "sometimes appears to be drawn from Mary, sometimes from Shelley" (Luke xiii); and 5) Lord Raymond, "the sole remnant of a noble but impoverished family," "the possessor of an immense fortune in England" (M. Shelley, TLM, 27), and friend to Adrian and Verney is fashioned after Byron. There are other important characters, such as Adrian and Idris' mother the Countess of Windsor, who figure selectively throughout the novel. These other characters are "sometimes, needless to say, drawn solely from imagination" (Luke xii).

Volume 1 introduces most of the predominant characters.

Mary Shelley opens with Verney's account of his present situation, alluding to both physical and mental conditions:

> I am the native of a sea-surrounded nook,
> . . . [which] presents itself to my mind
> . . . only as an inconsiderable speck in
> the immense whole . . . So true it is, <u>that man's mind alone was the creator of all that was good or great to man</u> . . .
>
> (5 -emphasis mine)

Immediately following the opening passage, Verney commences with his family history, the history of Adrian and Idris, their coming together and the ensuing events. Volume 1 traces events from the union of Adrian and Verney through the Grecian wars. Volume 2 picks up with Verney and Perdita's travel to Greece to be with Raymond, Raymond's death,and the infiltration of the plague into Southern Europe. Volume 3 is, essentially, Verney's recollection of the havoc wreaked by the plague and the desperate, but futile, efforts by the survivors to remain uncontaminated. There is, of course, a strong political undercurrent which pervades the novel. The political angle is introduced early on with Verney's story of England in his father's time, and followed through with the storyline of the position of Protectorate, first held by Raymond and later by Adrian.

The most important message of the novel which bears directly on the ideal of fellowship is introduced early in the novel when Verney and Adrian, whose fathers were

intimate friends, are united. In this section Verney is undergoing his transformation, under Adrian's influence, from a rebellious and socially outcast orphan to a cultured and educated individual. In this moment Mary Shelley captures the tension and release of Romantic abandonment, the unrest of a troubled spirit. Yet, she tapers this tendency towards "genius" with the critical ingredients of "fellowship." In The Last Man, particularly in the character of Verney, Mary Shelley explores the struggle to achieve and maintain "fellowship" against forces which are both within and outside of man's control, i.e. government and nature. Ultimately, though man is isolated, he will still cling to the hope of love and companionship, the crux of fellowship. In this early section of the novel Verney recounts his first recognition of wanting to achieve the ideals of fellowship. This achievement will propel him forward against all odds.

> I could not rest. I sought the hills . . . the stars glittered above. I ran on . . . trying to master the struggling spirit within me . . . "This," I thought, "is power! Not to be strong of limb, hard of heart, ferocious, and daring; but kind, compassionate and soft." . . . I also will become wise and good! . . . I was born anew . . . in innocence and love.
>
> (19 -emphasis mine)

In their young adulthood Verney and Adrian are

contrasted to each other much as Mary Shelley contrasts characteristics of the ideals genius and fellowship. Verney, though not striving for "genius" in the same manner as Walton and Frankenstein, captures the untamed isolated aspect which partly constitutes genius. Verney is, in essence, the primitive/savage man. Prior to his coming under the influence of Adrian, Verney recognizes the "monster" or "savage" he was beginning to become.

> I feared no man, and loved none. My life was like that of an animal, and my mind was in danger of degenerating into that which informs brute nature. (12)

The contrast is thus established between growth motivated by emotion, in a strictly irrational sense, and growth empowered through knowledge, acculturation, and love. These later qualities are, of course, what enable the individual to act according to the ideal of fellowship, with consideration and compassion for fellow man. The knowledge and cultivation with which Adrian endows and nourishes Verney awakens in him, Verney, the ability to perceive the world in a more enlightened fashion. It releases Verney from his previous oppression. It is clear wherein Mary Shelley's values lie:

> 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. (21)

While Adrian symbolizes fellowship and serves as mentor for Verney, at least in the earlier years, Adrian also typifies the condition of the poet-genius: "In person, he hardly appeared of this world; his slight frame was overinformed by the soul that dwelt within; he was all mind" (18). The virtues which Adrian upholds and works for are those of fellowship. Yet, his motivation is that of the "prometheus genius:"

> O, I shall be something now!
> From my birth I have aspired like
> the eagle -but, unlike the eagle,
> my wings have failed . . . but I
> can bring patience, and sympathy. (179)

It is the seeming goodness of Adrian that Verney admires. It is also Adrian's generosity which has opened the doors of "fellowship" for Verney.

> with Adrian . . . I now began to
> be human. I was admitted within that
> sacred boundary which divides the
> intellectual and moral nature of man from
> that which characterizes animals. My best
> feelings were called into play to give

> fitting responses to the generosity, wisdom, and amenity of my new friend. He, with a noble goodness all his own . . . (20)

The character of Adrian is a catalyst for Verney's "becoming." By nourishing Verney's intellect, Adrian is partly responsible for Verney's achievement of greater insight. Adrian's role (to Verney) is, thus, not unlike that of the Ancient Mariner (to the wedding guest). Verney becomes able to recognize both the social conscience Adrian adheres to and his tendency towards isolation.

> Strange ambition this! Yet such was Adrian. He appeared given up to contemplation, averse to excitement, a lowly student, a man of visions - (179)

Mary Shelley posits Adrian as the representative of the "poets bound" early on in the novel. Furthermore, while the other predominant characters have married and started families, Adrian remains matchless throughout the novel. In Verney's words:

> [Adrian] seemed destined not to find the half of himself, which was to complete his happiness. He often . . . wandered by himself . . . his books his only companion . . . his slender frame seemed overcharged with the weight of life, . . . his soul appeared rather to inhabit his body than unite with it. (65)

Near the end of the novel Adrian's self-appointed mission becomes the role of Protector to lead the remaining survivors from the plague and to care for the spirits and souls. Adrian's aspirations are not unlike those of the sick eagle that Keats describes in "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles." The most direct association that Mary Shelley makes between Adrian and the "poets bound," in particular Shelley, is Adrian's death. The circumstances, death during a storm at sea (323), are the same circumstances in which Shelley died.

In contrast to Adrian, Verney and the major female characters of the novel find their fulfillment in family and home (love and companionship).

> My heart had long been with them
> [his family]; and I felt sick with
> the hope and delight of seeing them again.
> Happiness, love and peace, . . . tempered
> the atmosphere. (158)

> My dearest interval of peace occurred
> [when] . . . I could repose in the
> dear home where my children lived. (280)

In the end Verney laments his own isolation while brooding on the companionship that the animals share:

> Have not they companions? Have not they
> each their mate-their cherished young,
> their home, which, though unexpressed to us,
> is, I doubt not, endeared and enriched . . .

> by the society which kind nature has created for them? (334)

Verney accepts and celebrates the values of fellowship. His belief that man is in control of his attitude ["man's mind alone was the creator"] is what temporarily sustains him. Though he is tolerant of his own despondency and alienation, his feeling for the creatures around him enables him to somehow retain sanity even while lamenting his isolation.

> It is I only that am alone . . . I only cannot express to any companion my many thoughts, nor lay my throbbing head on any bosom . . . [but] I will discipline my sorrowing heart to sympathy in your joys . . . Live on, ye innocents, nature's selected darlings. (334)

If, as some scholars have suggested, Verney is fashioned after Mary Shelley, then there is some justification in claiming that The Last Man is a testament to Mary Shelley's loneliness and isolation. Clearly the lack of fellowship is deeply mourned.

> Without love, without sympathy, without communion with any, how could I meet the morning sun? (337)

What place then does The Last Man occupy in Mary Shelley's exploration of the "irreconcilable paradox?"

Certainly genius and fellowship are not reconciled in the character of Adrian. Adrian is, after all, the poet called not unlike Wordsworth's own calling.

> Adrian felt that he made a part of a great whole . . . all nature was akin to him; the mountains and sky were his friends . . . (he) felt his life mingle with the universe of existence. His soul was sympathy, and dedicated to the worship of beauty and excellence. (31)

Adrian, then, heeded the call of genius over that of fellowship. His mission empowered him with a vigour perhaps equal to what Prometheus must have felt in defying the gods.

> He seemed born anew, and virtue, more potent than Medean alchemy, endued him with strength and health. [The] very excess of sensibility rendered him more capable of fulfilling his station of pilot . . . (219)

Adrian does not triumph, neither does his counterpart, Raymond, for "in truth, neither the lonely meditations of the hermit, nor the tumultuous raptures of the reveller,are capable of satisfying man's heart. From the one we gather unquiet speculation,from the other satiety" (26). Lord Raymond, modeled after Byron, also represents the "poets bound." Like Adrian, Raymond heeds the call of genius over that of fellowship.

> His passions were violent; as these often obtained mastery over him . . . self-gratification at least was the paramount object with him. He looked on the structure of society as but a part of the machinery which supported the web on which his life was traced . . . the heavens built up as a canopy for him. (31)

Even in death Raymond occupies as solitary a place as the isolated setting in which the final scene of "Manfred" is set.

> The chasm, deep, black, and hoary, swept from the summit to the base . . . close to the spot on which we stood, was a solitary rock . . . in which Raymond was placed. (151)

Both of the figures who attempt to govern England in the Republic era do not survive. In fact, they perish at the hand of "genius." In attempting to rule the ungovernable, nature and a society in which all structure has been annihilated, both men perish by greater forces, fate one among them. The fact that Mary Shelley "introduced a republic as the sociological landscape of her work divulges that sphere of influence, the tendency of thought, on which she was nurtured [Godwininism]" (Spark 184). Yet, Mary Shelley did not view the Republic as a viable system to replace the hierarchy which the people willingly displaced.

Indeed, "she shows that as the human race diminishes, losing its status as 'mankind' and becoming merely a number of people, so all moral concepts become meaningless: good and evil mean only pleasure and pain, life and death . . . the individual intellect [perishes] with the body" (185):

> In the face of all this we call ourselves lords of the creation, wielders of the elements, masters of life and death, and we allege in excuse of this arrogance, that though the individual is destroyed, man continues for ever. (167)

Overt political themes are essentially discarded after Raymond's death which occurs almost at the beginning of volume 2. Raymond's successor, Ryland, voluntarily and gratefully turns over the post of Protector to Adrian. Once this occurs there is little political "intrigue" in the novel as Mary Shelley focuses on Verney's reflections and narrative.

The novel for the most part becomes Verney's recollection of his struggle to maintain the ideals of fellowship. The Last Man is, thus, a step in an evolution from Frankenstein. Ultimately man is victim to forces far greater and far less tangible than mankind which

> "Mary Shelley had begun to anticipate in Frankenstein; but . . . Frankenstein is in a position to challenge his monster . . . . [I]n The Last Man, the menacing force has

> become as impersonal and impartial as nature,
> by which the individual man is held
> in isolated subjection" (Spark 198).

Walton was given a chance that Verney was not. In fact, Verney's "Ancient Mariner" is nature and nature operates according to a different set of laws not accountable to mankind. Verney's fate illustrates that without fellowship there is only the "life-in-death" situation, total isolation, the last man.

> Neither hope nor joy are my
> pilots . . . restless despair and
> fierce desire of change lead me on . . .
> to have some task . . . for each
> day's fulfilment. (342)

Conclusion: Mary Shelley's Vision of Romanticism

In Frankenstein Mary Shelley explored possible reconciliation of the ideals of genius and fellowship. In the character of Walton she presented the means by which such a reconciliation could be achieved and, of course, the sacrifices inherent in maintaining balance between such ideals. By the time of The Last Man Mary's optimism, though not her insight, had decreased. Whether or not the tone of The Last Man is evidence of Mary's passing from happier times into a painful isolation is conjecture, but such a hypothesis is gaining scholarly consensus. For example, Muriel Spark believes that "we must return to the fact that it is from her [Mary Shelley's] own experience of solitude, from the personal landscape of devastation she felt around her, that her wonderful story draws life" (198).

It is as if in telling the latter story Mary Shelley realized that reconciliation is only half the battle. Maintaining the ideals of fellowship in the face of adversity is a far more difficult task. By the time of the writing of The Last man it also appears that Mary Shelley has developed a stronger voice in her own critique of the socio-political system in which she had been raised. Perhaps, also, enough time had passed that the tragic consequences of the French Revolution could be more fully understood. The Last man is a much less symbolic novel than

Frankenstein and Lionel Verney a much more tragic hero than Walton.

In The Last Man Mary Shelley explores the consequences of a total breakdown in the system. As in Frankenstein where she cannot find resolution in the alternative to Godwinism, nor in Godwinism itself, Mary critiques both the displaced system and its possible replacement in The Last Man. There is a dependence within all facets of socio-political systems which Mary Shelley believes must be acknowledged and adhered to. If certain facets of the greater system operate independently the consequence is clearly isolation,as in the case of the seemingly antithetical ideals of genius and fellowship. The ultimate consequence of failing to resolve the paradox and/or the breakdown of the system is that fellowship finally gives way, as in the case of Lionel Verney. Lionel Verney could be the voice of Wordsworth's "Lines Written in Early Spring," lamenting the condition which mankind has brought upon itself and which nature has completed.

Both Frankenstein and The Last Man are somewhat fantastical, equally intense explorations into the relationships which constitute the essence of being, social and personal. Both novels are equally difficult to categorize. In fact, Muriel Spark for one believes that "The Last Man defies classification in any accepted fictional genre" (188). Frankenstein, as was discussed previously, while retaining some elements of the Gothic

transcends that genre. Modern scholarship has increasingly placed Frankenstein in the science-fiction genre. Like Frankenstein, The Last Man captures certain features of the Gothic "in so far as an improbable theme of horror maintains an illusion of probability" (Spark 188). Once again Muriel Spark, for example, asserts that The Last Man is actually a triptych of fictional genres encompassing elements of Gothic, pastoral domesticity, and realist-fantasy (188-9). The same could be said of Frankenstein.

Both Walton and Verney represent an attempt at coming to terms with the Romantic contradiction: no man should be an island unto himself, but, alas he is. However, Walton is given the opportunity to temper his drive for ambition with his need for fellowship and, thus, in compromising, Walton reconciles the ideals. Mary Shelley was able to stand outside of the tradition and critique its foundations by exploring the relationships and personae of characters she had endowed with facets of the ideals of genius and fellowship. On the other hand, The Last Man occupies a place further evolved from the stage of Frankenstein. The latter novel is a dark illustration of the cost of attaining some goals at the expense of others. It is almost as if Mary Shelley were painting a picture of what happens when the isolation rooted in the deep recesses of man's soul were to overtake and consume mankind. The excessive destruction of society transforms into (self) destruction rather than renovation.

Mary Shelley's use of her fiction as penetrating commentary on the ideals of the age in which she lived removed her from the core of Romanticism to the boundaries. From her vantage point she was able to act within the tradition while observing it. While her style can often be cumbersome, particularly in The Last Man, her insight and presentation bring in the dawn of the Dickensonian literary sensibility. Many of Mary Shelley's reflections are still deeply relevant to our present age if clothed in more modern situations.

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[*Under time and resource restrictions these were the only sources available for the citations in question.]

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