

Creator and Creation: Mary Shelley's Monstrous 'Last Men' in 'Frankenstein' and 'The Last Man'

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Abstract : Mary Shelley's two 19th century novels, the seminal *Frankenstein* (1818) and the less popular *The Last Man* (1826) draw on Gothic elements that invite a futuristic questioning and critique of man's fallibility and propensity to be the author of his own demise be it by transgressing natural law through a scientific endeavour or 'birthing' a plague. Recent scholarship about 'prophetic' voices in fiction considers *The Last Man* an influential but overlooked novel deserving of renewed scholarly interest. Through close textual analysis and comparative reading, this paper seeks to explore the continuities (and discontinuities) in thematic concern of creator and creation in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, emblematic in the oppositional characters of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature and Adrian, Earl of Windsor and Lionel Verney, his 'creation' in *The Last Man*. It argues that the creator/creation dynamic between *Frankenstein* and the Creature is to an extent revisited and inverted in Adrian and Verney but presented as no less problematic in *The Last Man*'s critique of man's inevitable folly despite nurturing and acceptance of the marginalised figure. Drawing on Romanticism ideals of nature, its foregrounding of a scourging pandemic as punishment for man's self-dislocation and with nature is a mirroring of *Frankenstein* and the Creature's own plague-like deterioration and alienation from self and nature. In a sense, both Verney and the Creature as solitary figures at the novels' denouement are 'last men', having learned much about man and society and upon whom the moral injunction rests. In Verney, however, the moral warning coupled with the hope that man can yet be saved offers a different reading perhaps from *Frankenstein* regarding the creator/creation dichotomy.

Keywords : creator/creation, *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, The Gothic, *The Last Man*

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