

MARY GODWIN SHELLEY: A STUDY OF ALIENATION

A THESIS
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY
MARION CARGILE MILLS, B. A.

DENTON, TEXAS

AUGUST, 1972

Texas Woman's University

Denton, Texas

July 20 1972

We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under
our supervision by Marion Cargile Mills
entitled Mary Godwin Shelley: A Study of Alienation

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Committee:

Judith H. McDowell
Chairman
Laron B. Fubwiler
Dean Bishop

Accepted:

Mary Evelyn Huey
Dean of Graduate Studies

Contents

	Page
INTRODUCTION.	1
CHAPTER	
I. Isolating Experiences in Mary Shelley's Life. . .	6
II. Man's Alienation from Man.. . . .	34
III. Man's Alienation from God.. . . .	70
CONCLUSION.	90
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	101

MARY GODWIN SHELLEY: A STUDY OF ALIENATION

Alone--Alone-- all, all alone
Upon the wide, wide, sea--
And God will not take pity on
My soul in agony!

The above lines deliberately misquoted from Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner are the last lines Mary Shelley wrote in her journal.¹ These lines represent the loneliness which haunted Mary Shelley all of her life, a loneliness magnified by a strong pessimism, not "intellectual pessimism" but "emotional pessimism" which consistently alienated her from others.² Even at her happiest times, she tended to prophesy doom:

Saturday, August 4 [1821]--Shelley's birthday. Seven years are now gone; what changes! what a life! We now appear tranquil; yet who knows what wind-- but I will not prognosticate evil; we have had enough of it. When Shelley came to Italy, I said all is well if it were permanent; it was more passing than an Italian twilight. I now say the same. May it be a Polar day; yet that, too, has an end. 3

¹Elizabeth Nitchie, Mary Shelley: Author of "Frankenstein" (New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1953), p. 13,n.34.

²Muriel Spark, Child of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (Hadleight: Tower Bridge Publications Limited, 1951), p. 120.

³Mary W. Shelley, Mary Shelley's Journal, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1947), p. 159. The original text is reproduced exactly in spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing as printed by the Oklahoma University Press.

Furthermore, her vision of life was essentially tragic. When she was only twenty she wrote Leigh Hunt:

Have you never felt in your succession of nervous feelings one single disagreeable truism gain a painful possession of your mind and keep it for some months. A Year ago, I remember my private hours were all made bitter by reflection on the certainty of death--and now the flight of time has the same power over me. Everything passes and one is hardly con[s]cious of enjoying the present before it becomes the past. 4

Moreover, Mary Shelley was inherently shy and reserved; all her life she referred to herself as "dormouse," and "she was almost morbidly averse to the least allusion to herself as an author."⁵ Mary wrote of herself in her journal in an attempt to justify her shy manner:

Saturday, June 30 [1836]. . . If I write the above, it is so those who love me may hereafter know that I am not all to blame, nor merit the heavy accusations cast on me for now putting myself forward. I cannot do that; it is against my nature. As well cast me from a precipice and rail at me for not flying. 6

Her shyness and reserve were often mistaken for coldness; even Shelley was to call her "cold moonshine."⁷ But Mary was not cold. All her life she assisted her family and friends whenever she could. In addition, she gave much moral and financial support to young people of talent,⁸ and she never forgot her old friends

⁴Mary W. Shelley, The Letters of Mary W. Shelley, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1944), I, 21. The original text is reproduced exactly in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing as printed by the Oklahoma Press.

⁵Eliza Rennie, Traits of Characters (London, 1860), L, 113, rp. Nitchie, p. 19.

⁶Shelley, Journal, p. 206.

⁷Shelley, Letters, I, 198.

⁸Spark, p. 113.

of Italy, even though she suffered their condemnation for the life she had chosen after Shelley's death and their criticism of the way she chose to edit Shelley's work. She attempts to justify her behavior in her journal:

February 12 [1839] . . . In so arduous a task others might hope for encouragement and kindness from their friends--I know mine better. I am unstable, sometimes melancholy, and have been called on some occasions imperious; but I never did an ungenerous act in my life. I sympathise warmly with others, and have wasted my heart in their love and service. 9

Mary Shelley was doomed to be misunderstood. Her natural reserve and seemingly placid temperament created barriers between herself and others, and when she broke away from such behavior, she was often disappointed and disillusioned with herself and with others. Therefore, she retreated and built greater barriers which only intensified her loneliness.¹⁰

Mary Shelley viewed life solipsistically.¹¹ That each man lives in isolation and is therefore alone became for Mary the prevailing theme of her work and her life. Her struggle against personal loneliness is revealed in her letters and her journals, and although her personal loneliness may have been exaggerated, her painfully acute awareness of loneliness cannot be ignored.¹²

⁹Shelley, Journal, p. 207.

¹⁰Nitchie, p. 14.

¹¹Spark, p. 113.

¹²Nitchie, p. 13.

Loneliness "runs like a dark thread" through most of her work, and although some of her fictional characters find happiness, in Mary Shelley's two best novels, The Last Man and Frankenstein, move two figures, Lionel Verney and the Monster, whose loneliness is "final and irreparable."¹³ It is then, the purpose of this paper to examine the theme of loneliness and alienation in Mary Shelley's life and work.

I have devoted the first chapter of this paper to an examination of those incidents in Mary's life which might have contributed to her awareness of loneliness as a driving force in the lives of men. I will provide substantiating material from her numerous letters and her journal. Although scholarly interest in her literature is limited, much material is available on Mary Shelley's life both before and after Shelley's death. The most complete biographies of Mary Shelley's life are Mary Shelley: A Biography, by R. Glynn Grylls, and Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, by Julian Marshall. These two books have been extremely valuable for the first chapter of this paper because they offer sound material for cross indexing dates and facts as well as interesting comments on Mary Shelley's personality and conduct.

I will devote the remaining chapters of this paper to an examination of the theme of alienation in Mary Shelley's novels;

¹³Nitchie, p. 15.

in Chapter Two, man's alienation from man, and in Chapter Three, man's alienation from God. The material for these two chapters is taken from Frankenstein Or , the Modern Prometheus, The Last Man, Mathilda, and Falkner. In addition, I will refer to the philosophies of William Godwin and Percy Shelley, who were influential in forming Mary Shelley's concept of man's alienation from God and from his fellow man.

Chapter I

Isolating Experiences in Mary Shelley's Life

Mary Godwin Shelley was the only child born of the controversial marriage of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. Ten days after her birth on August 30, 1797, her famous mother died of a fever. Mary was left in the care of the irascible William Godwin, who, after many years of careless bachelorhood, found himself responsible for the infant Mary and her three-year-old half-sister Fanny Imlay, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and Gilbert Imlay.¹⁴ Godwin was not prepared. He wrote shortly after Mary Wollstonecraft's death:

The poor children! I am myself totally unfitted to educate them. The scepticism which perhaps sometimes leads me right in matters of speculation is torment to me when I would attempt to direct the infant mind. I am the most unfit person for this office; she [Mary Wollstonecraft] was the best qualified for this office; she was the best qualified in the world. What a change! You can understand the difference. ¹⁵

Godwin's self-pity and obvious distress about his situation foreshadows the pathos of his decline from the exuberant author of Political Justice and devoted husband of Mary Wollstonecraft to what later critics have called the "shuffling hypocrite and needy spendthrift of a dishonourable old age."¹⁶

¹⁴R. Glynn Grylls, Mary Shelley: A Biography (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938), pp. 1-10; Julian Marshall, The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1889), I, 1-11.

¹⁵Marshall, I, 14.

¹⁶Grylls, p. 12.

Forsaking his earlier condemnation of matrimony, Godwin began immediately to seek a new wife to relieve him of the responsibility of two infant children. After many successful proposals to various women, all of whom probably would have made a better mother for Mary, he finally settled in 1801 on a Mrs. Clairmont, a widow with two children. The next year, the only son of William Godwin was born. The family now consisted of the rationalistic Godwin; his daughter Mary; Mary Wollstonecraft's melancholy daughter Fanny; Mrs. Clairmont's son Charles and her daughter Jane, one year younger than Mary; and the infant son of William Godwin and Mrs. Clairmont. The divergent family settled down to long years of financial difficulties aggravated by consistent conflicts in character and temperament.

Godwin gratefully relinquished to Mrs. Clairmont his responsibilities as father. She made most of the decisions regarding the children and business. That she did not make a happy home for the children did not seem to matter to Godwin, just as long as he did not have to make any decisions, even those which affected Mary.¹⁷

¹⁷Grylls, pp. 13-14; Marshall, I, 12-25.

In a letter to an unknown correspondent several years later, Godwin reveals his evasion of responsibility for his daughters:

Your enquiries relate principally to the two daughters of Mary Wollstonecraft. They are neither of them brought up with an exclusive attention to the system of their mother The present Mrs. Godwin has great strength and activity of mind, but is not exclusively a follower of their mother; and indeed, having formed a family establishment without having a previous provision for the support of a family, neither Mrs. Godwin nor I have leisure enough for reducing novel theories of education to practice, while we both of us honestly endeavour, as far as our opportunities will permit, to improve the minds and characters of the younger branches of our family . . . 18

Although Mrs. Godwin never shirked her responsibilities towards the children's health or physical well-being, she obviously did not win Mary's love or respect, for Mary despised her all her life, and unfortunately and unfairly, Mary blamed Mrs. Godwin for Godwin's decline in character.¹⁹ Mrs. Godwin might have been jealous of Mary, for, after all, Mary was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, and all the famous people who visited Godwin were interested in the child of the famous woman.²⁰

¹⁸Grylls, pp. 13-14.

¹⁹Shelley, Letters, I, 4.

²⁰Grylls, p. 15.

That Godwin himself did not understand his daughter is revealed in a letter he wrote to Mr. Baxter in 1812 when Mary, fourteen, was sent to live with the Baxters in Scotland:

There never can be a perfect equality between father and child, and if he has other objects and avocations to fill up the greater part of his time, the ordinary resource is for him to proclaim his wishes and commands in a way somewhat sententious and authoritative, and occasionally to utter his censures with seriousness and emphasis.

It can, therefore, seldom happen that he is the confident of his child, or that the child does not feel some degree of awe or restraint in intercourse with him. I am not, therefore, a perfect judge of Mary's character. I believe she has nothing of what is commonly called vices, and that she has considerable talent . . . I am anxious that she should be brought up (in this respect) like a philosopher, even like a cynic . . . 21

The two years with the Baxters in Scotland offered Mary her first insight into a tranquil family life she tried so hard to obtain in her later life.²² When after two years Mary came back to Skinner Street and her family, apparently little notice was taken of her return. Godwin wrote in his diary May 30, 1814, "M. W. G. at supper."²³

Now, sixteen and a half years old, Mary was small, very blonde, slender, and deeply serious; she was no longer a child. In the chaos of the Godwin home, she found little intellectual companionship.

²¹Marshall, I, 28.

²²Grylls, p. 19

²³Marshall, I, 37.

Disagreements with her step-mother had not lessened over the years despite her stay in Scotland. Fanny Imlay seemed incapable of offering any comfort, and Godwin characteristically was too involved in financial difficulties to be relied on. Mary began to visit her mother's grave daily, taking her books with her, simply to find a place of solitude to study and daydream.²⁵

Her visits to her mother's grave offered Mary an opportunity to contemplate her wishes for the future. She felt her uniqueness. After all, she was the daughter of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. She was expected to live up to the reputations of her parents, but the confusion in her family offered her little stimulation toward achievement. She was inhibited by "her father's rationalism, inculcated into her from the earliest years,"²⁶ and she had been taught to restrain her natural passions; consequently, she was painfully shy with strangers. At sixteen and a half, then, Mary Shelley was vulnerable.

On May 5, 1814, Mary met Percy Shelley for the second time. At their first meeting two years before, Mary had been a child; Shelley had been accompanied by his wife, Harriet. By June, 1814, Shelley, separated from Harriet, was meeting Mary almost daily in her secret meeting place by her mother's grave.²⁷ Convinced

²⁵Grylls, p. 27.

²⁶Spark, p. 28.

²⁷Grylls, p. 28; Marshall, I, 51.

that Harriet had been unfaithful to him, Shelley no longer felt any moral ties to his wife.²⁸ Mary Godwin, a student of Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal philosophies, and William Godwin's professed, though rarely practically applied, radical beliefs, felt no compunction to deny the love she felt for Percy Shelley, nor did she regret that on July 28, 1814, she and Shelley left England together.²⁹ She was soon to regret, however, that her step-sister, Jane Clairmont, went with them. From the beginning, they began what was to become a lifelong occupation, studying and reading together and worrying about Jane Clairmont's problems. Jane Clairmont, who changed her name to Claire for aesthetic reasons, became for them a burden which Shelley and Mary dutifully accepted, for "Claire looked upon Shelley then, as she did in her old age, as part of her property, and did as much as she could to obtain what she considered her fair share of attention."³⁰ Although Shelley was extremely conscientious about Jane's problems, he seemed oblivious to financial problems. He had not provided enough money for the trip abroad, and they were forced to return to England penniless, but happy, unaware of the sufferings which awaited them.

²⁸Walter Sidney Scott, ed., Harriet and Mary: Being the Relations Between Percy Bysshe Shelley, Harriet Shelley, Mary Shelley, and Thomas Jefferson Hogg As Shown in the Letters Between Them Now Published For the First Time (Great Britain: Godden Cockerel Press, 1944) p. 40.

²⁹Shelley, Journal, p. 3; Grylls, p. 31; Marshall, I, 61-67.

³⁰Spark, p. 33.

In September they returned to England, and their troubles began. Many of Mary's friends along with her family rejected her impetuous act and turned against her. Rumours that Godwin actually sold his two daughters to Shelley began to circulate. In addition, Harriet's creditors threatened Shelley with debtors' prison, and Mary found herself expecting her first child. Claire Clairmont did not offer much comfort to Mary, for she found that she was unwilling to return to Godwin's house, and hating the idea of becoming a governess, she quarreled with Shelley and Mary constantly.³¹

During the next few months, Mary then was essentially alone. Shelley did not live with her during October and November because he was afraid of arrest. Forced to meet Shelley secretly, Mary rebelled against such meetings. In one of her long and lonely letters to Shelley during this time, she revealed her desire to remain unnoticed and inconspicuous:

. . . will you be at the door of the coffee house at five o'clock as it is disagreeable to go into those places and I shall be there exactly at that time & we will go into St. Pauls where we can sit down. . .³²

In another letter she wrote:

. . . three o'clock exactly just at Holborn bars- I know you will be punctual for you know I dislike walking up an[d] down in a public place. . .³³

³¹Shelley, Journal, pp. 15-25; Grylls, pp. 41-44; Marshall, I, 82-89.

³²Shelley, Letters, I, 4.

³³Shelley, Letters, I, 6-7.

In November, the danger of arrest over, Shelley returned home, but because of frequent illness due to her pregnancy, Mary was unable to be the constant companion she once was for him. The following entry in her journal reveals that she was not totally free of some bitterness over Shelley's commitments elsewhere:

Tuesday, December 6 [1814]--Very unwell. Shelley and Clara walk out, as usual, to heaps of places. Read Agathon, which I do not like as well as Peregrine. A letter from Hookham, to say that Harriet has been brought to bed by a son and heir. Shelley writes a number of circular letters of this event, which ought to be ushered in with ringing of bells, &c, for it is the son of his wife. [*Italics hers*]³⁴

Shelley's financial situation improved early in 1815 because of his inherited legacy at his grandfather's death, but personal problems continued unabated. On February 8, 1815, Mary's baby was born prematurely; Mary awoke four days later to find her little girl dead beside her:

Sunday, March 19th [1815]--Dream that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived. Awake and find no baby. I think about the little thing all day. Not in good spirits. Shelley is very unwell. . . 36

³⁴Shelley, Journal, p. 28.

³⁵Shelley, Journal, p. 35; Grylls, p. 47; Marshall, I, 103.

³⁶Shelley, Journal, p. 41; Grylls, p. 47.

By summer, however, things were better for the Shelleys. Claire had finally gone to Lynmouth to live. Shelley was busy writing Alastor, and Mary was expecting her second child. Their troubles--Claire's quarrels and the death of their baby, along with Godwin's whining for money while at the same time castigating them for their immoral life together--had taken some of the lustre out of their lives.³⁷ Shelley grew restless as he always did in tranquil times. Constantly disappointed in reality, Shelley continuously moved about in search of new experiences, new emotions to stimulate his poetic genius. But Mary was still for him a haven, the rock about which he swirled. There were times later, however, when he could no longer find much comfort in her serenity.

Each year that Mary and Shelley were together seemed more frantic than the last. The year 1816 was no exception. William, their second child, was born in January. The family, accompanied by Claire, of course, traveled to Switzerland where they met and lived near Byron and where Mary began her first book, the famous Frankenstein. Mary and Shelley discovered that Claire was expecting Byron's child. In the fall, after their return to England, Claire and Mary hid away at Bath while Shelley stayed in London in an effort to partially silence the ugly rumours

³⁷Grylls, pp. 49-54; Marshall, I, 112-113.

that Claire was expecting Shelley's child. But worst of all were the two deaths for which Shelley was held responsible: on October 10, 1816, Fanny Imlay, Mary's half-sister, committed suicide; two months later, Harriet Westbrook drowned herself.³⁸

During this terrible year, it was Mary who stayed calm even though she was often left alone to contend with Claire. Her journal in Switzerland records that Byron and Shelley went out on their boat almost every day. She dutifully recorded most of their reading and writing. Later in the fall, when she and Shelley were forced to be separated again because of their many problems, her letters to Shelley reveal her love and her life-long concern for his well-being as well as her loneliness:

Sweet Elf

I was awakened this morning by my pretty babe and was dressed time enough to take my lesson from Mr. West and (Thank God) finished that tedious ugly picture I have been so long about--I have also finished that 4 chap[ter] of Frankenstein which is a very long one & I think you would like it.

And where are you? and what are you doing my blessed love; I hope and trust that for my sake you did not go outside this wretched day, while the wind howls and the clouds seems to threaten rain. And what did my love think as he rode along--Did he think about our home, our babe and his poor Pecksie? But I am sure you did and thought of them all with joy and hope--But in the choice of [a] residence--dear Shelley--pray be not too quick or attach [sic] yourself too much to one spot--Ah--were you indeed a Winged Elf and could soar over mountains & seas and

³⁸Shelley, Journal, pp. 50-71; Grylls, pp. 54-73; Marshall, I, 124-180.

could pounce on the little spot--A house with a lawn
 a river or a lake--noble trees & divine mountains
 that should be our little mousehole to retire to.
 But never mind this--give me a garden & absentia Clariae
 and I will thank my love for many favours. . . 39

Shelley could always rely on Mary's unswerving devotion and support. When Harriet Westbrook died, Shelley found himself in battle with her family for the custody of the children. But his love for Mary did not waver during these terrible times primarily because Mary was able to control her emotions and lend the support Shelley needed. Though in an effort to get the children they married on December 30, 1816, Shelley was not awarded custody, and his spirits declined markedly. Mary did not fail, however to offer the sympathy he needed.⁴⁰

Other problems beset them in 1817. Unfounded fears that the Chancellor who had denied Shelley custody of his children after Harriet's death might attempt to take William from them and apprehension caused by Shelley's uncertain health made them feel they must leave England. Worst of all, however, were the vicious rumours circulating about the paternity of Claire's child. Many assumed the child was Shelley's. Shelley typically shouldered the responsibility of making Byron face his obligation to Claire and her little girl, Allegra. And so they determined to go to Italy.⁴¹

³⁹Shelley, Letters, I, 14.

⁴⁰Grylls, pp. 73-82; Marshall, I, 178-181.

⁴¹Grylls, pp. 77-89; Marshall, I, 192-210.

During the months prior to their departure, Mary again was forced to draw from her seemingly boundless strength to face difficult problems. She and Shelley were often separated during these months, and Mary suffered deeply from loneliness. While in London arranging for the publication of Frankenstein, Mary wrote melancholy and lonely letters to Shelley:

Why is not life a continued moment where hours and days are not counted--but as it is a succession of events happen--the moment of enjoyment lives only in memory and when we die where are we? . . . Pray write--I hear so little from Marlow that I can hardly believe that you and Will man live there. 42

Mary's inherent melancholy and tension caused by emotional restraint began to increasingly surface. Her ill health during and after pregnancy contributed to her depression. Clara, their third child, was born September 2, 1817.⁴³ During her confinement, Shelley was again absent from home because of fear of debtors' prison,⁴⁴ and Mary was haunted by loneliness and misunderstandings not alleviated by Claire or the Leigh Hunts who were staying with her. She wrote to Shelley September 25, 1817:

I do not see a great deal of our guests; they rise late and walk all the morning. This is something like a contrary fit of Hunt's for I meant to walk today and said so; but they left me, and I hardly wish to take my first walk by myself; however, I must tomorrow if he shows the same want of tact. . . .⁴⁵

⁴²Shelley, Letters, I, 25-26.

⁴³Shelley, Journal, p. 84.

⁴⁴Grylls, P. 85.

⁴⁵Shelley, Letters, I, 30.

Distress over financial matters aggravated Mary's sense of depression. She wrote in October to Shelley, who was trying to make preparations to leave England:

Remember we lost all the little property we had at Bishopgate by going up to town--here we have much more to loose & I must not leave this house until such things as we do not dispose of are put in a place of safety. ⁴⁶

Furthermore, Godwin, afraid he would lose a good source of income, desperately tried to keep the Shelleys from going to Italy, and Mary, confounded by her confused relationship with her father, agonized over his disapproval of their leaving. She wrote to Shelley:

I know not whether it is early habit or affection but the idea of his silent quiet disapprobation makes me weep as it did in the days of my childhood. ⁴⁷

Finally, in the spring of 1818, the Shelley family departed for Italy. The years in Italy, 1818 to 1823, were filled with events which were to change Mary forever. Her natural emotional restraint served her well during these years for without it surely she would have lost her mind. Her emotional restraint, however, was misconstrued for coldness, and she was to suffer greatly because she felt she was misunderstood. Although the Shelleys' financial situation improved and their minds were finally "undisturbed by weekly bills & daily expences,"⁴⁸ they were plagued

⁴⁶Shelley, Letters, I, 44.

⁴⁷Shelley, Letters, I, 45.

⁴⁸Shelley, Letters, I, 95.

with other more pressing problems. Byron proved inconsistent and belligerent in his attitude toward Claire and Allegra, and Shelley was constantly agitated about them. Finally, Claire gave in to Byron's demands and relinquished to him the care of their daughter. Byron, pressed by Shelley to shield Allegra from the decadent life Byron was leading, eventually placed the child in a convent. In the interim, however, Claire kept trying to see Allegra, and Shelley was always the mediator.⁴⁹ Mary was often left at home with the children. She wrote to Maria Gisborne:

. . . Shelley and Clare are gone (they went today) to Venice on important business and I am left to take care of the house--now if all of you or any of you would come and cheer my solitude it would be exceedingly kind. . . 50

Shelley and Claire finally persuaded Byron to let Claire visit her child, and Shelley elatedly wrote to Mary to join him in Venice immediately. Mary complied even though little Clara was ill. The trip was horrible; they were constantly delayed, and by the time they reached Venice on the evening of September 24, 1818, Clara was seriously ill. She died at seven o'clock that evening.⁵¹ Mary, "as if ashamed of her first outbreak of despair when she realized there was no hope,"⁵² forced herself not to

⁴⁹Grylls, pp. 95-99; Marshall, I, 212-218.

⁵⁰Shelley, Letters, I, 55.

⁵¹Shelley, Journal, p. 105; Grylls, p. 101; Marshall, I, 226-227.

⁵²Grylls, p. 101.

give in to grief, and her journal of the following weeks reveals days filled with sightseeing, reading, and visiting friends.⁵³ Shelley, with a burst of creative energy typical after tragedy, completed Julian and Maddalo and worked on his drama Prometheus Unbound.⁵⁴

Although Mary tried to hide her grief from her friends, she did write her father seeking comfort; he answered:

MY DEAR MARY--I sincerely sympathize with you in the affliction which forms the subject of your letter, and which I may consider as the first severe trial of your constancy and the firmness of your temper that has occurred to you in the course of your life; you should, however, recollect that it is only persons of a very ordinary sort, and of a pusillanimous disposition, that sink long under a calamity of this nature. I assure you such a recollection will be of great use to you. We seldom indulge long in depression and mourning except when we think secretly that there is something very refined in it, and that it does us honour. 55

Godwin's typical advice at such a time could only cause Mary to further subjugate her outward emotions and force her grief inward.

After sightseeing continuously in Venice, Mary and Shelley turned toward Rome. They filled their days with sightseeing and their evenings with reading, working, and visiting friends. Both were filled with sadness, but somehow they seemed not to be able to reach each other in their grief. Mary shut her feelings inside

⁵³Shelley, Journal, 105-109; Grylls, p. 101; Marshall, I, 226-227.

⁵⁴Marshall, I, 228.

⁵⁵Marshall, I, 229.

of her, and Shelley tried to appear cheerful, but his poems of this period reveal the depth of his grief.⁵⁶ On the other hand, this mournful period caused Shelley to be able to quickly complete Prometheus Unbound. By April, Shelley was again feeling the depression which he always felt after the exultation of completing a long work,⁵⁷ but his depression was alleviated somewhat by new acquaintances and aroused interest in the art of Rome. They delayed too long in Rome, however, for on June 2, 1819, William suddenly became ill; he died June 7, 1819.⁵⁸

Mary was never to recover from the death of her two children within such a short period. She wrote in her journal:

Wednesday, August 4 [1819]--I begin my journal on Shelley's birthday. We have now lived five years together; and if all the events of the five years were blotted out, I might be happy; but to have won and then cruelly to have lost, the association of four years, is not an accident to which the human mind can bend without much suffering. 59

Nothing could reach Mary in her despair over the death of her two children. She later described her feelings at the time as if she were in "quicksand, sinking beneath my feet. . . ." ⁶⁰ She regressed further into her own private grief, and neither

⁵⁶Marshall, I, 232.

⁵⁷Marshall, I, 238.

⁵⁸Grylls, p. 109; Marshall, I, 241-243.

⁵⁹Shelley, Journal, p. 122.

⁶⁰Shelley, Journal, p. 183.

Shelley's grief nor the anticipation of another child due in the fall could alleviate her great sorrow. She broke under the strain of the deaths of her beloved children, and Shelley could not comprehend such anguish. It was she who now needed a strength upon which to rely, but in this Shelley failed her. He wrote:

My dearest Mary, wherefore hast thou gone,
 And left me in this dreary world alone?
 Thy form is here indeed--a lovely one--
 But thou art fled, gone down the dreary road,
 That leads to Sorrow's most obscure abode;
 Thou sittest on the hearth of pale despair,
Where
 For thine own sake I cannot follow thee. 61

Tragedy inspired Shelley's art. Although he suffered, he found some relief in his work, and he did not understand Mary's continuing grief.⁶² He simply could not comprehend her feelings for her children, two precious lives lost to her forever, the embodiment of all good in her love for Shelley, her strength, her immortality, even her very soul buried forever in the dust of Italy.

Again Mary sought advice and comfort from her father. His letter of September 9, 1819, reiterated his lifelong teachings of

⁶¹Percy Bysshe Shelley, "To Mary Shelley," John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley Complete Poetical Works (New York: Random House), p. 620.

⁶²Grylls, pp. 110-111; Marshall, I, 246-251.

emotional stoicism which she tried to follow, but which only created walls between herself and others. The letter clearly illustrates Godwin's devastating influence on Mary:

MY DEAR MARY--Your letter of 19th of August is very grievous to me, inasmuch as you represent me as increasing the degree of your uneasiness and depression.

You must, however, allow me the privilege of a father and a philosopher in expostulating with you on this depression. I cannot but consider it as lowering your character in a memorable degree, and putting you quite among the commonalty and mob of your sex, when I had thought I saw in you symptoms entitling you to be ranked among those noble spirits that do honour to our nature. What a falling off is here! How bitterly is so inglorious a change to be deplored!

What is it you want that you have not? You have husband of your choice, to whom you seem to be unalterably attached, a man of high intellectual attainments, whatever I and some other persons may think of his morality, and the defects under this last head, if they be not (as you seem to think) imaginary, at least do not operate as towards you. You have all the goods of fortune, all the means of being useful to others, and shining in your proper sphere. But you have lost a child; and all the rest of the world, all that is beautiful, and all that has a claim upon your kindness is nothing, because a child of two years old is dead. [William was actually three years old when he died.]

The human species may be divided into two great classes: those who lean on others for support, and those who are qualified to support. Of these last, some have one, some five, and some ten talents. Some can support a husband, dependents, and some can support a world, contributing by their energies to advance their whole species one or more degrees in the scale of perfectibility. The former class sit with their arms crossed, a prey to apathy and languor, of no use to any earthly creature, and ready to fall from their stools if some kind soul, who might be compassionate, but who cannot respect them, did not come from moment to moment to endeavour to set them up again. You were formed by nature to belong to the best of these classes, but you seem to be shrinking away, and voluntarily enrolling yourself among the worst.

Above all things, I entreat you, do not put the miserable delusion on yourself, to think there is something fine, and beautiful, and delicate, in giving yourself up, and agreeing to be nothing. Remember,

too, thought at first your nearest connections may pity you in this state, yet that when they see you fixed in selfishness and ill humour, and regardless of the happiness of everyone else, they will finally cease to love you, and scarcely learn to endure you.

The other parts of your letter afford me much satisfaction. Depend upon it, there is no maxim more true or more important than this; Frankness of communication takes off bitterness. True philosophy invites all communication, and withholds none. 63

With a birth of a son, Percy Florence, in November, Mary began to slowly recover from her deep depression. Shelley wrote of the birth to Leigh Hunt:

You may imagine that this is a great relief and a great comfort to me amongst all my misfortunes. . . . Poor Mary begins (for the first time) to look a little consoled; for we have spent, as you may imagine, a miserable five months. 64

The consolation of a new baby in the house brought Mary back to life and action. She began to work again on her novel, Valperga, and the Shelleys moved to Pisa to get away from the heat of Leghorn. Mary was relieved finally of the company of her sister Claire, but Claire was replaced by the boring Tom Medwin. 65 Edward and Jane Williams joined them in Pisa in January, 1821. 66 The constant swirl of people in their home offered Mary little opportunity to completely recover from the dejection brought about by the deaths

63
Marshall, I, 254-256.

64
Marshall, I, 259-260.

65
Grylls, pp. 119-124.

66
Shelley, Journal, p. 146.

of her two children. "Motherhood. . . a household. . . free from strangers, worry, and ill health" would have made here life with Shelley more "that perfect companionship" they had known in the beginning. But instead, Mary was to suffer the debilitating effects of another pregnancy along with the knowledge that Shelley felt he had to continue his search for the "ideal love."⁶⁷

In the fall of 1820, the Shelleys met Emilia Viviani, a beautiful Italian girl who resided in the convent at Pisa. She was poor, and her father had placed her there until he could find a suitable husband who would take her without dowry. Her beauty and her predicament proved irresistible to Shelley, her youth and intelligence seeming to him the embodiment of perfection. Shelley fancied he had found the superior mind and ethereal beauty he had always been searching for. He shortly realized his mistake, but not before he wrote Epipsychidion dedicated to her.⁶⁸ His audacity at assuming if only temporarily that Emilia Viviani embodied characteristics and talents greater than Mary's is forgiveable only because of the great poem he created while under his delusion. Wisely, Mary refused to compete. She remained calm, knowing that Shelley's infatuation would pass. She never mentioned suspicion in her letters to friends or to Claire, who was in Florence and obviously interested in the outcome of the

⁶⁷Grylls, p. 113.

⁶⁸Grylls, pp. 134-136; Marshall, I, 273-276.

affair.⁶⁹ By spring of 1821, Shelley had exhausted his idealization of Emilia, and he and Mary were acting as mediators between Emilia and a suitor. To confound the picture, Shelley suddenly developed an intense dislike for Mary's Greek tutor, Mavrocordato.⁷⁰

Although Mary never expressed doubt of Shelley's loyalty to her, she must have been deeply troubled by the feelings expressed in Shelley's poem to Emilia. Mary too might have written, as Shelley did in Revolt in Islam, "Yet never found I one not false to me."⁷¹ After the affair ended, she could not restrain herself from writing bitterly to Maria Gisbourne:

Emilia has married Biondi; we hear that she leads him and his mother (to use a vulgarism) a devil of a life--The conclusion of our friendship a la Italiana puts me in mind of a nursery rhyme which runs thus--

As I was going down Cranbourne Lane,
Cranbourne Lane was dirty,
And there I met a pretty maid,
Who dropped to me a curtsey;
I gave her cakes, I gave her wine,
I gave her sugar candy,
But oh! the little naughty girl!
She asked me for some brandy.

Now turn Cranbourne Lane into Pisa Acquaintances, which I am sure are dirty enough, and 'brandy' into that wherewithall to buy brandy (and that no small però) and you have the whole story of Shelley's Italian platronics. ⁷²

⁶⁹Grylls, pp. 277-279; Marshall, I, 273-276.

⁷⁰Spark, p. 67.

⁷¹Percy Shelley, p. 41.

⁷²Shelley, Letters, I, 161.

Unlike Shelley, Mary never sought in human form the ideal spirit. She willingly accepted the world on its own terms. She wrote in her journal:

February 25 [1821]. . . let me love the trees, the skies, and the ocean, and that all encompassing spirit of which I may soon become a part--let me, in my fellow creature, love that which is--and not fix my affection on a fair form endued with imaginary attributes; where goodness, kindness and talent are, let me love and admire them at their just rate, neither adorning, or diminishing, and, above all, let me fearlessly descend into the remotest caverns of my own mind, carry the torch of self-knowledge into its dimmest recesses; but too happy if I dislodge any evil spirit or enshrine a new deity in some hitherto uninhabited nook. 73

This attitude extended also to her relationship with Shelley.

"She did not attempt to change Shelley nor to impose her own personality over his, and all her writings on Shelley provide the most forcible answer that can be offered to those who, superficially, interpret Mary as a selfish and cold woman."⁷⁴

Mary's experiences had proved "the transience of things."⁷⁵ The spring of 1822 began quietly, but Mary in her typical melancholy way began to prophesy coming storms.⁷⁶ The Edward Williamses were living close by. Mary had finished Valperga, and Shelley had completed Adonais. Mary discovered she was expecting another child. As usual she was not well during her pregnancy, but this time, she was determined to follow the doctor's advice so as not

⁷³Shelley, Journal, p. 169.

⁷⁴Spark, p. 53.

⁷⁵Spark, p. 73.

⁷⁶Shelley, Letters, I, 179; Grylls, p. 160.

to endanger her health. Suddenly, in April they received news that Allegra had died of typhus at the convent in Rome. The dreadful news brought back to Mary all the sufferings she had endured when her own babies died, and her spirits once again sank. The Williamses had finally moved in with them, and the constant presence of people combined with her illness due to her pregnancy only made Mary more despondent. Shelley could not understand why she was so despondent. Jane Williams began to accompany him on his long walks and in his boat because Mary was too ill, and, besides, she was not a pleasant companion. Shelley's mild flirtation with Jane resulted in numerous gay and lighthearted poems in addition to several bitter ones because his home life was less than ideal:⁷⁷

When I return to my cold home, you ask
 Why I am not as I have ever been,
 You spoil me for the task
 Of acting a forced part in life's dull scene--⁷⁸

Mary was on the verge of a serious illness, and she could not shake off her depression even though she knew it distressed Shelley. She was to write to Maria Gisborne of those days:

. . . I was not well in body or mind. My nerves were wound up to the utmost irritation, and the sense of misfortune hung over my spirits. No words can tell you how I hated our house & the country about it. Shelley reproached me for this--his health was good & the place was quite after his own heart--⁷⁹

⁷⁷Grylls, pp. 151-164; Marshall, I, 316-363; Spark, pp. 80-83.

⁷⁸Spark, p. 83.

⁷⁹Shelley, Letters, I, 179.

On June 16, 1822, Mary miscarried her fifth child. Shelley, ignoring everyone's advice to wait for the doctor, saved Mary's life by applying ice to stop her hemorrhage. During the days following, Shelley had terrible nightmares and waking visions which frightened everyone around them. Though Mary and Shelley moved closer together during these few weeks,⁸⁰ when Mary realized that the Hunts were arriving and would add their huge numbers to the already crowded Shelley home, she was completely distressed. In her condition she could not assume responsibility for another family. She wrote to Leigh Hunt, begging him not to come:

I know that S[helley] has some idea of persuading you to come here. I am too ill to write the reasonings only let me entreat you let no persuasions induce you to come. Selfish feelings you may be sure do not dictate [to me] - but it w[oul]d be complete madness to come--81

The Hunts came anyway. Byron had proved undependable as usual; he had invited the Hunts to stay with him, but he suddenly decided to leave Italy. Shelley felt responsible for the Hunts' being in Italy; therefore, when he learned they were to arrive in Leghorn in early July, he, Edward Williams, and the sailor Charles Vivian sailed to Leghorn to greet them.⁸²

⁸⁰Shelley, Letters, I, 180; Grylls, pp. 165-166; Marshall, I, 360; Spark, pp. 83-84.

⁸¹Shelley, Letters, I, 172; Spark, p. 84.

⁸²Grylls, p. 166; Marshall, I, 364; Spark, p. 85.

Mary had not wanted Shelley to make the trip as she later wrote to Maria Gisborne:

. . . I could not endure that he should go--I called him back two or three times & told him that if I did not see him soon I would go to Pisa with the child--I cried bitterly when he went away. 83

On Monday, July 8, 1822, during the return voyage, Shelley, Edward Williams, and the boy Charles Vivian were drowned when their boat capsized during a storm. The bodies washed ashore weeks later, and Trelawney and Byron presided over the cremation of Shelley's body on the beach near Via Reggio, August 16, 1822.⁸⁴ Mary was then to learn the true meaning of solitude. The only love she had known or ever would know was dead.

Although naturally shy and dependent, Mary had always been strong. Her greatest strength was revealed after Shelley's death when she found herself alone, in deep financial difficulty, and the sole supporter of their only surviving child, Percy.⁸⁵ She sought aid and advice from Byron in November:

. . . It is a painful thing to me to put forward my own opinion. I have been so long accustomed to have another act for me; but my years of apprenticeship must begin. If I am awkward at first, forgive me. I would, like a dormouse, roll myself in cotton at the bottom of my cage, & never peep out. 86

⁸³Shelley, Letters, I, 181.

⁸⁴Shelley, Letters, I, 182-185; Grylls, pp. 167-171; Marshall, I, 1; Spark, pp. 85-86.

⁸⁵Grylls, pp. 175-177; Marshall, II, 5-38; Spark, pp. 86-88.

⁸⁶Shelley, Letters, I, 202.

Although advised not to return to England, Mary knew that her own as well as her son's future lay in England. For herself, she had to negotiate personally with her publishers, for she could not rely on her father.⁸⁷ In addition, she had to remember that her son was the grandson of a lord. She did not shirk her solitary responsibility toward her child. She wrote of her child in her journal:

October 2, [1822]. . . Literary labours, the improvement of my mind, and the enlargement of my ideas, are the only occupations that elevate me from my lethargy; all events seem to lead me to that one point, and the courses of destiny having dragged me to that single restingplace, have left me. Father, mother, friend, husband, children--all made, as it were the team that conducted me here; and now all except you, my poor boy (and you are necessary to the continuance of my life), all are gone, and I am left to fulfill my task So be it. ⁸⁸

Mary was never to leave England, and she never married again. She earned her living primarily with her novels and stories. Sir Timothy, Shelley's father, eventually allowed her a greater pension for Percy at the death of Shelley's oldest son, Charles, when Percy became the sole heir to the titles. In addition to supporting herself and Percy, Mary also contributed to the support of her father for the rest of his life. She also assisted her friends and her sister Claire as much as she possibly could. But the Pisa Circle never quite forgave her for being Shelley's wife.⁸⁹ Their old

⁸⁷Shelley, Letters, I, 247.

⁸⁸Shelley, Journal, p. 205.

⁸⁹Grylls, pp. 182-271; Marshall, II, 39-325; Spark, pp. 87-121.

friends had never had the genius that Shelley had; they knew it, and they often showed their resentment by berating Mary. Her biographer, Muriel Spark, notes:

Spiritually, if not intellectually, Hogg remained an undergraduate; Trelawney, a comic-opera buccaneer; even the gentle Hunt, an eloquent, domesticated, one-time martyr; and the manque spirit took its revenge . . . by various displays of nastiness. . . [toward Mary]⁹⁰

Although they found fault with her chosen mode of life, Mary did not completely sever her ties with her friends. She was particularly dependent upon the friendship of Jane Williams. However, after her marriage to Thomas Hogg, Jane spread ugly rumours of an estrangement between Shelley and Mary before Shelley's death. She gossiped about her flirtation with Shelley, and blamed Mary for all of Shelley's misfortunes and unhappiness. Mary never completely forgave her friend for her disloyalty.⁹¹ She wrote bitterly in her journal:

Saturday, June 30 [1838]--My early friends chose the position of enemies. When I first discovered that a trusted friend had acted falsely by me, I was nearly destroyed. My health was shaken. I remembered thinking, with a burst of agonizing tears, that I should prefer a bed of torture to the unutterable anguish a friend's falsehood engendered. There is no resentment; but the world can never be to me what it was before. Trust, and confidence, the heart's sincere devotion, are gone.⁹²

⁹⁰Spark, p. 3

⁹¹Grylls, pp. 195-197; Marshall, II, 153-168; Spark, pp. 98-100.

⁹²Shelley, Journal, p. 205.

Losing her friend hardened Mary, but it also allowed her to become less reliant on friends of the past and the agonizing memories connected with them.

Throughout the remainder of her life, Mary made new friends, different from those she and Shelley had known, less impulsive, less controversial. She attempted to follow a more orderly and conventional life, for she had paid the price of marching to the beat of a different drummer. Now she had to preserve at all costs the one remaining vestige of her love for Shelley, their son. She never forgot her obligations to him, nor did she forget the genius of the man she had married. She worked all her life to see that Shelley received the recognition he deserved, and it was due in great part to her efforts that posterity has known so much about Shelley and his work.⁹³

Mary Shelley's life revealed to her that she was alone, divided from others, even those she loved best, by barriers which no human being can bridge. She often blamed herself for those barriers; she often blamed others, but she was to learn that loneliness is a fact of life, an impenetrable, incomprehensible truth, and she suffered because she recognized this truth so completely. Mary Shelley's journal, her letters, her novels reveal one clear, concise truth which Mary Shelley lived totally; each man is alone.

⁹³Nitchie, p. 164.

Chapter II

Man's Alienation from Man

Mary Shelley's life as revealed in her journals and letters illustrates her keen awareness of the isolation of the individual. Her novels, Mathilda, Falkner, Frankenstein Or, The Modern Prometheus, and The Last Man, clarify her intense concept of the loneliness of the individual. Consistently writing of people who are isolated, she emphasizes their solitary lives with descriptions of lonely and remote scenery and often magnifies their isolation by uncontrollable passions which ultimately divide the individuals even from themselves. She further illustrates man's isolation by revealing that the tyranny of his social institutions perpetuates his solitary condition, and she climaxes her philosophy of isolation by asserting that even if social conditions change, man is still alone.

Mary Shelley sees man as essentially isolated and therefore a tragic creature.¹ She writes in Falkner of man's isolated condition:

We human beings are so unlike one to the other,
that it is often difficult to make one person
understand that there is any force in an impulse
which is omnipotent with another. 2

¹Hugh J. Luke, Jr., "Introduction," The Last Man (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. xvii.

²Mary Shelley, Falkner (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837), I, 71.

This isolation is intensified by the complex nature of man:

How little. . . do we know of our fellow-creatures--
each shrouded in the cloak of manner--that cloak of
various dyes--displays little of the naked man within. 3

All of Mary Shelley's chief characters in her fiction are
solitary people, bound to themselves, but always attempting
to come to terms with an "unintelligible universe,"⁴ as
illustrated in two of her poorest novels, Mathilda and Falkner,
and two of her best novels, Frankenstein Or, The Modern
Prometheus, and The Last Man.

Mathilda, in which Mary Shelley portrays the complicated
relationship between herself and her father, reveals three
isolated people who can never unite. After her mother dies,
Mathilda is deserted by her father. She grows up in a remote
area of Scotland reared by an aunt who has the coldest heart
"that ever filled a human breast."⁵ Her life is a lonely one,
and she refers to it with Wordsworth's lines from "She Dwelt
Among the Untrodden Ways":

_____ there were none to praise
And very few to love. 6

³ Shelley, Falkner, III, 239.

⁴ Luke, p. xviii.

⁵ Mary Shelley, Mathilda, ed. Elizabeth Nitchie (Chapel
Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 8.

⁶ Shelley, Mathilda, p. 9.

After her father spends sixteen years wandering the world alone trying to come to terms with his grief, he returns to find Mathilda almost grown. The father and daughter spend lonely hours together rediscovering each other, until one day her father realizes the true nature of his feelings for his daughter. His incestuous desires drive him to suicide and Mathilda to an enforced solitude because of her own incipient incestuous passion and her guilt over her father's death. Mathilda's solitude is broken after two years by the appearance of the lonely Woodville, an "idealized version of Shelley."⁷ But Woodville cannot draw Mathilda away from her depression brought about by guilt and self-pity, and Mathilda eventually dies.

In her last novel, Falkner, Mary Shelley again makes use of the solitary figure. Falkner is reared without love and understanding from his father or his relatives. He considers himself alone, until he meets Alithea. He feels he has found companionship with her, but he is forced to leave her because of her father's dislike for him. He becomes a soldier, earning a reputation for his aloofness. Twelve years later when he returns in search of Alithea, he learns that she has been forced to marry a cruel and vindictive man. In an attempt to force her to leave with him, he accidentally kills her.

⁷
Spark, p. 152.

Afterwards, consumed with grief and guilt for his crime, he escapes to a barren village on the southern coast of Cornwall, where, while attempting to commit suicide, he meets the orphaned child Elizabeth Raby. Realizing that the child is as alone as he is, he takes her as his adopted daughter, but because his guilt is so great, and because he fears that his part in Alithea's death will be discovered, he begins to travel all over the world. Falkner and the child make no friends because they constantly move about. However, Falkner cannot escape his guilt feelings.

I travelled from place to place, pursued by Alithea's unbraiding ghost, and my own torturing thought. By frequent change of place, I sought to assuage my pangs; I believe I increased them. ⁸

When Elizabeth is fourteen, she and Falkner accidentally meet Gerard Neville, Alithea's only surviving child. Alithea's whereabouts had never been discovered; no one knew the true facts of her disappearance, and Gerard had suffered a great deal because of rumors of his mother's possible infidelity. He had grown up swearing revenge on his mother's abductor, and his singlemindedness had made him "friendless":

In person, he was a model of beauty and grace. . . but these were nursed in anguish and wrong, and strained from their true conclusions into resentment, suspicion, and a fierce disdain of all who injured, which seemed to his morbid feelings all who named or approached him. ⁹

⁸Shelley, Falkner, II, 285.

⁹Shelley, Falkner, II, 137.

Eventually, Gerard Neville and Elizabeth Raby fall in love. Falkner is forced to tell the truth of Alithea's death when he realizes that his crime has injured Gerard:

He was blighted and destroyed by me; gloomy, savage, and wild, eternal sorrow was written on his brow, fear and hatred gleamed in his eyes. 10

Falkner agonizes because he feels his confession will separate him from Elizabeth:

Forgive your friend that he deserts you; long ago he deserted himself and the better part of life; it is but the shell of him that remains; and that corroded by remorse, and the desire to die. 11

Elizabeth stands by her father during his imprisonment and trial, even though she realizes that she may lose Gerard. Gerard is torn by his desire for revenge and his love for Elizabeth, but ultimately, he forgives Falkner for his crime, and he and Elizabeth marry. Falkner is freed from prison, but not from self-torment:

He had repented; and was forgiven, we may believe, in heaven, as well as on earth. He could not forgive himself--and this one shadow remained upon his lot--it could not be got rid of. . . 12

Falkner ends on a relatively happy note, but Frankenstein and The Last Man do not. The loneliness of the Monster in Frankenstein and Lionel Verney in The Last Man is final and irreparable."¹³

¹⁰Shelley, Falkner, II, 286.

¹¹Shelley, Falkner, II, 288.

¹²Shelley, Falkner, III, 317.

¹³Nitchie, p. 15.

Robert Walton, the narrator of Frankenstein, is a solitary who is attempting to explore the North Pole. In his letters to his sister he complains:

. . . I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy, and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend. . . ¹⁴

He finds a friend in Frankenstein, who relates the strange story of the creation of the Monster. Frankenstein, like Walton, is a solitary, but his loneliness has not been lifelong. Frankenstein had been surrounded by loving parents and friends until he had created the Monster who destroyed all of those Frankenstein loved. When Walton and Frankenstein meet, Frankenstein is pursuing the monster in hopes of killing him. Of the three main characters, however, it is the Monster who is the most alone. His life burst forth from the odds and ends collected in "charnel houses and graveyards."¹⁵ No one like him exists; he is totally unique, and he suffers the agonies of the different:

God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred. ¹⁶

¹⁴Mary Shelley, Frankenstein Or, The Modern Prometheus (New York: Signet Classic New American Library, 1965), p. 18.

¹⁵Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 53.

¹⁶Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 21.

Another solitary figure is Lionel Verney, the chief character and narrator of Mary Shelley's futuristic novel set in the twenty-first century, The Last Man. His ultimate loneliness, like Frankenstein's, is a result of the loss of all those he once loved. Unlike Frankenstein, however, Lionel Verney was a lonely and isolated youth:

My first real knowledge of myself was as an unprotected orphan among the valleys and fells of Cumberland. I was in the service of a farmer; and with crook in hand, my dog at my side, I shepherded a numerous flock on the near uplands. I cannot say much in praise of such a life; and its pain far exceeded its pleasures. There was freedom in it, a companionship with nature, and a reckless loneliness. . . 17

Because of this early life, devoid of human sympathy, he has been hardened:

At the age of sixteen I had shot up in appearance to a man's estate; I was tall and athletic; I was practised to the feats of strength, and inured to the inclemency of the elements. . . I feared no man, and loved none. 18

His sister, Perdita, is also a solitary figure, who offers and receives little comfort:

¹⁷Mary Shelley, The Last Man (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 8

¹⁸Shelley, The Last Man, p. 12.

Perdita was all--sufficient to herself. Notwithstanding my lawless habits, my disposition was sociable, hers recluse. My life was spent among tangible realities, hers was a dream. . . . Perdita, even in joy, fled to loneliness, and could go on from day to day, neither expressing her emotions, nor seeking a fellow-feeling in another mind. . . . 19

The ultimate loneliness which Lionel Verney faces is occasioned by loss. He marries Idris, sister of Adrian Windsor; he becomes a trusted friend of Adrian and Lord Raymond; he seeks and finds companionship among a wide circle of friends and in his studies. But with the onslaught of the world-destroying plague from which he is the only survivor, Lionel Verney loses all those he loves; he loses all hope of knowing another human being. He is alienated from all human intercourse, and his loss is doubly tragic because he had experienced love.²⁰

Along with the essential isolation of the main characters, Mary Shelley's books and stories emphasize the loneliness which pervades the lives of all people. She writes, for example, of people who are orphaned or who had only one parent. Mathilda's father "lost his father early."²¹ Mathilda's mother died when Mathilda was born, and she did not know her father until she was

¹⁹Shelley, The Last Man, pp. 10-11. Spelling and punctuation are reproduced as published by Univ. of Nebraska Press.

²⁰Luke, p. xviii.

²¹Shelley, Mathilda, p. 2.

sixteen. Lionel and Perdita Verney were orphans. Adrian and Idris Windsor were reared by the implacable Countess Windsor. Lord Raymond in The Last Man was "the sole remnant of a noble but impoverished family."²² Falkner lost his mother while still an infant, and his father was an incorrigible drunkard. Elizabeth Raby was also an orphan, and Gerard Neville's only parent, his father, alienated his son by his wicked and cold behavior. Frankenstein's mother died when he was a young man, and the Monster he created had no relatives.

Furthermore, Mary Shelley emphasizes the loneliness of her characters by her descriptions of lonely and remote scenery. For example, Mathilda during childhood "rambled amidst the wild scenery of [the] lovely country"²³ of Northern Scotland. When her father died, Mathilda retires to the lonely heaths of Northern England to be alone in her self-pity:

I fixed myself on a wide solitude. On the dreary heath bestrewn with stones, among which short grass grew; and here and there a few rushes beside a little pool. . . . My view was bounded only by the horizon except on one side where a distant wood made a black spot on the heath, that every where else stretched out its faint hues as far as the eye could reach, wide and very desolate. Here I could mark the net work of the clouds as they wove themselves into thick masses: I could watch the slow rise of the heavy thunder clouds and could see the rack as it was driven across the heavens, or under the pine trees I could enjoy the stillness of the azure sky. ²⁴

²²Shelley, The Last Man, p. 27.

²³Shelley, Mathilda, p. 10.

²⁴Shelley, Mathilda, p. 51.

The scenery of Falkner also emphasizes the loneliness of the characters and foreshadows their unhappiness. The book opens in the "almost unknown" village of Treby in southern Cornwall. When Falkner kidnaps Alithea, a storm breaks; its intensity reflects the wild emotion of the moment:

The roar of ocean, torn up by the wild west wind,
now mingled with the universal uproar--hell had
broken loose upon earth--yet what was every other
noisy tempest compared to that which shook my soul,
as I pressed Alithea to my heart in agony. . . 25

The storm ebbs after Alithea dies; Falkner buries her on the lonely beach near a wind-swept tree:

the wild waste sea, dark and purple beneath the
lowering clouds--the dreary extent of beach--the
far, stupendous mountains, thrown up in sublime,
irregular grandeur, with cloud-capt peaks, and
vast gulfs between. . . the river, the hut, the
monumental tree. . . 26

Mary Shelley also makes use of remote and lonely scenes to symbolize the theme of isolation in Frankenstein. Robert Walton and Frankenstein meet in the frozen wastes of the North Pole. As Frankenstein tells Walton the strange story of the creation of the Monster, the floating ice, the thunder of its breaking, and the barren wilderness create the proper setting for such a strange story. Mary Shelley utilizes the frozen wasteland again later when

²⁵Shelley, Falkner, II, 265.

²⁶Shelley, Falkner, III, 34.

Frankenstein and the Monster meet on Mont Blanc:

The abrupt side of vast mountains were before me;
the icy wall of glacier overhung me; a few shattered
pines were scattered around; and the solemn silence
of this glorious presence-chamber of imperial nature
was broken only by the brawling waves or the fall of
some vast fragment, the thunder sound of the avalanche
or the cracking, reverberated along the mountains, of
the accumulated ice, which, through the silent working
of immutable laws, was ever and anon rent and torn,
as if it had been but a plaything in their hands. 27

When Frankenstein first agrees to make a mate for the Monster,
he retires to the isolated Orkneys for his labors. There on
the island, which is "hardly more than a rock whose high sides
were continually beaten by the waves,"²⁸ he makes a fateful
decision to discontinue his work, even at the risk of destroying
his family. The ice imagery appears again with Frankenstein's
pursuit of the Monster even across the frozen top of the world.
The ice, broken only after Frankenstein dies, symbolizes the
isolation of the human spirit. The "burning agonies" of the
ice-bound existences of both Frankenstein and his creature finally
come to an end when the Monster swears:

I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and
exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The
light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes
will be swept into the sea by the winds. 29

²⁷ Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 92.

²⁸ Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 156.

²⁹ Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 211.

In The Last Man, Mary Shelley persistently foreshadows the ultimate devastation of the human race with descriptions of natural scenes. Lionel Verney's early childhood in the lonely Cumberland Valley prepares him for his role as the last man on earth. Later, during the seige of Stamboul, the climate foreshadows the coming plague which would destroy the city:

. . .the southern Asiatic wind came laden with intolerable heat, where the streams were dried up in their shallow beds, and the vast basin of the sea appeared to low under the unmitigated rays of the solstitial sun. Nor did night refresh the earth. Dew was denied; herbage and flowers there were none; the very trees drooped; and summer assumed the blighted appearance of winter, as it went forth in silence and flame to abridge the means of sustenance to man. 30

Nature reflects the terror of the last inhabitants during a storm at Portsmouth:

When the mighty luminary approached within a few degrees of the tempest-tossed horizon, suddenly, a wonder! three other suns, alike burning and brilliant, rushed from various quarters of the heavens towards the great orb; they whirled round it. The glare of light was intense to our dazzled eyes; the sun itself seemed to join in the dance, while the sea burned like a furnace, like all Vesuvius a-light, with flowing lava beneath. 31

However, only people die; the earth continues. Seasons change; Flowers grow; rain falls. The last remnant of the dying population seeks relief from the plague in colder climates, their fear

30 Shelley, The Last Man, p. 137.

31 Shelley, The Last Man, p. 270.

intensified by "weed-grown fields, desolate towns, the wild approach of riderless horses."³² The plague pursues them even to the Alps, but there it dies, and the last four survivors bury the last victim:

. . . we carried the body to this desolate spot, and placed it in those caves of ice beneath the glacier, which rive and split with the slightest sound, and bring destruction of those within the clefts--no bird or beast of prey could here profane the frozen form. 33

Death does not stop, however, for three of the remaining four die of other causes, and only Lionel Verney remains to ascend St. Peter's in Rome and to carve "on its topmost stone the aera 2100, last year of the world!"³⁴

Man's isolated position is magnified not by his setting alone, but also by his uncontrollable passions, the absence of reason or imagination, and the subsequent loss of a sense of duty and worth. Irrational passions are often a result of improper education and lack of genuine affection during childhood aggravated by feelings of personal loss. For example, Mathilda's father "was a man of rank: he had lost his father early, and was educated by a weak mother with all the indulgences she thought due to a nobleman of wealth."³⁵ He loves his wife, however, and when she dies, his irrational grief and self-pity cause him to desert his infant, therefore shirking his responsibilities:

³²Shelley, The Last Man, p. 291.

³³Shelley, The Last Man, p. 309.

³⁴Shelley, The Last Man, p. 340.

I must break all ties that at present exist. I shall become a wanderer, a miserable outcast-alone! Alone! 36

Under the care of a cold and irresponsible aunt, Mathilda leads a lonely and frustrated childhood. When Mathilda's father returns, he transfers all his pent-up love for his dead wife to his daughter. His response to his daughter is irrational and incestuous:

We have leapt the chasm I told you of, and now, mark me, Mathilda, we are to find flowers, and verdure and delight, or is it hell, and fire, and tortures? Oh Beloved One, I am borne away . . . Let me lay my head near your heart; let me die in your arms. 37

Mathilda rejects her father, and in so doing forces him to commit suicide. Full of guilt and remorse, Mathilda becomes a recluse and retires to the northern wilds of England:

My eyes were seldom raised and often filled with tears; no song; no smiles; no careless motion that might bespeak a mind intent on what surrounded it--I was gathered up into myself--a selfish solitary creature ever pondering on my regrets and faded hopes. 38

She is offered another chance to relieve her solitude when Woodville offers his love, but Mathilda, wrapped in self-pity and self recriminations, reject him:

. . . for I was doomed while in life to grieve, and to the natural sorrow of my father's death and its most terrific cause, imagination [sic] added tenfold weight

³⁶Shelley, Mathilda, p. 7

³⁷Shelley, Mathilda, p. 31.

³⁸Shelley, Mathilda, p. 52.

of woe. I had believed myself to be polluted by the unnatural love I had inspired, and that I was a creature cursed and set apart by nature. . . .I did not feel thus frantically [sic] when first I knew that the holy name of father was become a curse to me: but my lonely life inspired me with wild thoughts. . . .I was in truth a marked creature, a pariah, only fit for death. 39

Falkner, the chief character of Mary Shelley's last book, also feels that he is "a creature cursed and set apart by nature." His "childhood's years were stormy and drear,"⁴⁰ and "certainly no touch of natural love warmed his [father's] heart."⁴¹ Falkner is forced by his uncle to attend a boarding school where punishment and cruel treatment were the order of the day. There, he only becomes hardened:

I declared war with my whole soul against the world;
I became all I had been painted; I was sullen, vindictive,
desperate. 42

Finally, Falkner meets Alithea Rivers, the better half of himself. He loves her completely even though he is separated from her for twelve years, during which time she marries Neville, a man Falkner considers beneath her. Again his uncontrolled passions bred from youth erupt when he learns of their marriage:

. . .from the moment I felt assured that I had seen
Alithea's husband, something departed from the world
such as I had once known it, never to return again. 43

³⁹Shelley, Mathilda, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁰Shelley, Falkner, III, 167.

⁴¹Shelley, Falkner, III, 169.

⁴²Shelley, Falkner, II, 173.

⁴³Shelley, Falkner, II, 230.

His wild passions come near insanity when he kidnaps Alithea against her will, and when in her struggle to escape him, she is accidentally drowned. Falkner himself analyses his mad behavior:

What moved me to this height of insanity--what blinded me to the senseless, as well as the unpardonable nature of my design, I cannot tell; except that, for years, I have lived in a dream, and waking in the real world, I refused to accomodate myself to its necessities, but resolved to bend its laws to my desires. ⁴⁴

To confound his guilt, he buries her body without ceremony under a tree near the bay where she drowns.

Alienation from loved ones caused by uncontrollable passions is repeated in The Last Man in the marriage of Lord Raymond and Perdita. Raymond, from youth, was filled with "desire of renown, and presumptuous ambition,"⁴⁵ and his life with Perdita was not as he had envisioned it. Raymond finds in Evadne, a woman whom he had known before his marriage, an outlet for his feelings of power. He lies to Perdita about the relationship with Evadne, and his irrational lack of truth, a cardinal sin to Godwin, creates a barrier between them. This barrier changes him, alienating him from Perdita as well as from his duties as the Protector of England just before the plague begins. Perdita accuses him of loving another, and

⁴⁴Shelley, Falkner, II, 257-258.

⁴⁵Shelley, The Last Man, p. 85.

in his effort to believe himself innocent, his false life becomes the truth for him:

He forgot that each word he spoke was false. He personated his assumption of innocence even to self-deception. Have not actors wept, as they portrayed imagined passions? . . . He spoke with pride; he felt injured. 46

Their love is contaminated by confused emotions and irrational behavior:

Truth and falsehood, love and hate lost their eternal boundaries, heaven rushed in to mingle with hell; while his [Raymond's] mind, turned to a field for such battle, was stung to madness. He heartily despised himself, he was angry with Perdita, and the idea of Evadne was attended by all that was hideous and cruel. 37

Raymond neglects his duties, his wife, and his lover. Unable to forgive Raymond's love for Evadne, Perdita leaves him and refuses to have his name spoken in her presence. Raymond finds Perdita's behavior incomprehensible. He resigns the Protectorship because he cannot solve the problems of his domestic life, and he assumes that the only answer is to escape to Greece to once more fight the war of liberation.

Raymond explains himself to Lionel Verney:

. . . I perceive, too soon for my own happiness, too late for England's good, that I undertook a task to which I am unequal, I cannot rule myself. My passions are my masters; my smallest impulse my tyrant. 48

Raymond and Perdita are victims of passions which they cannot control.

⁴⁶Shelley, The Last Man, p. 89.

⁴⁷Shelley, The Last Man, p. 91.

⁴⁸Shelley, The Last Man, p. 91.

Merrival, the astronomer, another character in The Last Man, is also a victim of ungoverned passions. Unlike Raymond's quest for power, Merrival's quest is for the perfection of mankind "six thousand years hence."⁴⁹ His crime is that "he was far too long sighted in his view of humanity to heed the casualties of the day and lived in the midst of contagion unconscious of its existence."⁵⁰ His oversensitive intellectualism refuses to comprehend the plague:

This poor man, learned as La Place, guileless and unforseeing as a child, had often been on the point of starvation, he, his pale wife, and numerous offspring, while he neither felt hunger, nor observed distress. His astronomical theories absorbed him; calculations were scrawled with coal on the bare wall of his garret; a hard-earned guinea, or an article of dress, was exchanged for a book without remorse; he neither heard his children cry, nor observed his companion's emaciated form. . . 51

Merrival does not perceive the danger to his family until one of his children dies. He loses his entire family one by one:

The old man felt the system of the universal nature which he had so long studied and adored, slide from under him, and he stood among the dead, and lifted his voice in curses. 52

Madly, he refuses to leave the graves of his family; he raves to his loyal friend, Lionel Verney:

Here they are. . . beautiful creatures--breathing, speaking, loving creatures. She who by day and

⁴⁹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 210.

⁵⁰Shelley, The Last Man, p. 209.

⁵¹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 209.

⁵²Shelley, The Last Man, p. 221.

night cherished the age-worn lover of her youth--they, parts of my flesh, my children--here they are: call them, scream their names through the night; they will not answer!. . . my bones, my flesh, I, myself, are already buried here. . . 53

In his anguish, Merrival recognizes that the better part of himself is dead and irretrievable.

The irrational behavior of the characters Mary Shelley created is a reflection of the irrationality Godwin condemns in Political Justice. To Godwin, irrationality comes about as a result of improper education, illogical reasoning, and denial of the truth. Godwin attempts to formulate a philosophy which would lead to the perfection of man. Mary Shelley, on the other hand, utilizes Godwin's philosophy of irrationality to emphasize that irrationality further alienates men from each other. Mary Shelley denies Godwinism and the perfectability of man by recognizing the dual nature of man, his emotional as well as his rational being. Her fictional characters reveal in their behavior the pursuit or rejection of the inner man either the rational or the emotional. "The shadow or double of the self is a constant conceptual image in Blake and Shelley."⁵⁴ and in typical Romantic fashion Mary Shelley's characters often represent the ego and id of a

⁵³Shelley, The Last Man, p. 221.

⁵⁴Harold Bloom, "Afterword," Frankenstein Or, The Modern Prometheus (New York: Signet Classic New American Library, 1965) p. 213.

of a single person. For example, when Merrival sees the loss of his family, he is driven mad in his desire to be reconciled with his own lost being.

Another example is Perdita who describes Raymond as "the sole possessor of my affection; single object of my hopes, the best half of myself."⁵⁵ When Raymond realizes that he has lost Perdita he says, "I have lost that which adorned and dignified my life; that which linked me to other men."⁵⁶ Furthermore, and perhaps of even greater significance is that Perdita exploits Raymond by her insistence on his assuming a role which is unnatural to him. Raymond plays the "great man" for Perdita, whom he describes as

. . . wedded to an imagination careless of what is behind the veil, whose character is in truth faulty and vile. . . . But we must live, and not act our lives; pursuing the shadow, I lost the reality--now I renounce both. 57

Falkner, too, is obsessed with the pursuit of his better self. Alitheia represents to him all that is good in himself, and he feels she is a part of him:

. . . the idea of Alitheia was so kneaded up and incorporate with my being, that my living heart must have been searched and anatomized to its core, before that portion belonging to her could have been divided from the rest. 58

⁵⁵Shelley, The Last Man, p. 102.

⁵⁶Shelley, The Last Man, p. 110.

⁵⁷Shelley, The Last Man, p. 110.

⁵⁸Shelley, Falkner, II, 218.

When he realizes that she belongs to another, he is driven to madness, and he destroys her.

Like Falkner, Mathilda's father pursues the better part of himself, first in Mathilda's mother, then in Mathilda herself, and Mathilda find completeness in her love for her father:

I felt as if I were recreated and had about me all the freshness and life of a new being: I was, as it were transported since his arrival from a narrow spot of earth into a universe boundless to the imagination and the understanding. 59

However, she cannot accept the responsibility of the evil side of her nature represented by her father's incestuous desires for her; therefore, she hides from the world forever separated, but constantly tortured by her own evil and guilt:

In solitude only shall I be myself; in solitude I shall be thine. 60

The previous discussion reveals that Mary Shelley's characters behave irrationally because they are products of "external circumstances,"⁶¹ the acceptance of which, according

59 Shelley, Mathilda, p. 16

60 Shelley, Mathilda, p. 49.

61 H. N. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), p. 74.

to Godwin, is necessary in order for man to begin the road to perfection. Godwin contends that despotic institutions and individuals work together to undermine the individual will. Chief of the despotic influences of man are education and politics.⁶² To these premises Mary Shelley adds the irrational effects of inadequate affection. The previous discussion also reveals that Mary Shelley accepts the dual nature of man as an essential ingredient of the human being. In so doing, Mary Shelley rejects Godwin's concept of voluntary action which Godwin perceives as "accompanied by foresight,"⁶³ with a definitive result rationally in view. Godwin contends that the rational man thinks before he acts, that the end result of his action will be clearly in view before he acts. But "the mischief of his faith in logic as a force, was that it led him to ignore the aesthetic and emotional influences, by which the mass of men can best be led to a virtuous ideal."⁶⁴ Mary Shelley corrects his error when, anticipating modern thought, she realizes that "internal struggles assume

⁶²
Brailsford, p. 72.

⁶³
Brailsford, p. 75.

⁶⁴
Brailsford, p. 75.

a rational form only when self-consciousness reviews them--
 that is to say when they are over."⁶⁵ Thus, Mary Shelley
 has attempted to create out of the Godwinian philosophy a
 separate philosophy which more thoroughly recognizes the con-
 flicting nature of man. In formulating her philosophy, she
 reveals that not only is man isolated from other human beings,
 he is isolated from himself in his constant struggle between
 the good and evil of his own being.

From her first novel, Frankenstein, to her last novel,
Falkner, Mary Shelley pursues this "paradox of identity and
 conflict."⁶⁶ Frankenstein is wise enough to realize the ties
 between himself and the Monster:

I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind
 . . . nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own
 spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy
 all that was dear to me.⁶⁷

Both creatures suffer from the separation; both behave irration-
 ally. Frankenstein's obsession to create a human being is
 not the "too-perfect balance of imaginative and rational
 faculties"⁶⁸ of the eighteenth-century man who destroys himself.

⁶⁵
 Brailsford, p. 74.

⁶⁶
 Spark, p. 138.

⁶⁷
 Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 69.

⁶⁸
 Spark, p. 138.

The scientist is not rational in the Godwinian sense because he does not foresee the results of creating such a being:

I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. 69

But later Frankenstein moves toward the Godwinian goal when realizing his mistake, he does not repeat it. After the Monster pleads with him to create a mate for him, Frankenstein projects into the future and prophesies doom for the world if a whole race of such beings is allowed to exist. Therefore, he refuses to comply with the Monster's request even though he jeopardizes his family. Here again Frankenstein reveals his Godwinian rationalism, for Godwin requires that the rational man view "the good of mankind. . . as superior to all private obligation."⁷⁰ It is Frankenstein's creation, not himself, who finally represents raw emotion deprived of the balance of rationalism and inflamed by personal rejection.

The Monster's irrational behavior also comes about as a result of injustice inculcated in him from the onset of his life.

⁶⁹Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 69.

⁷⁰Burton R. Pollin, "Philosophical and Literary Sources of Frankenstein," Comparative Literature, 17 No. 2 (Spring, 1965), p. 105.

First, his creator rejects him. The the Monster recognizes that he is unique:

. . . I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. 71

He sees himself as totally alone:

. . . where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses. . . 72

Frankenstein's monster reaches out for human sympathy and is rejected. His fury begins when he burns the peasant cottage where he has hidden. After he rescues a child from drowning and is shot for his trouble, his rage increases:

This was then the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being from destruction, and as recompense I now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound which shattered the flesh and bone. The feelings of kindness and gentleness which I had entertained but a few moments before gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind. 73

He kills Frankenstein's brother William, and arranges for the nurse to be accused of the crime. Finally, when Frankenstein rejects his plea to create a mate for him, the Monster becomes
74
"an all-out perpetrator of evil."

Frankenstein swears revenge on his evil creation of his own being and madly pursues him across the world even to the

71 Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 115.

72 Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 115.

73 Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 135.

74 Spark, p. 149.

North Pole. There Frankenstein dies. The Monster then reveals to Walton the essence of the complex relationship between himself and Frankenstein:

Once I had falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. 75

Rejected, the Monster recognizes the evil within him, which Mary Shelley views as emotion deprived of rational balance, and that recognition of his own evil drives out all feeling within him except self-hatred, the final irrational alienation from himself and from a society which by its nature perpetuates self-hatred.

Mary Shelley's condemnation of the degrading effect of all social institutions echoes Godwin's denunciation of society in Political Justice. Like Godwin, Mary Shelley believes that "man is the most formidable enemy to man."⁷⁶ Mary Shelley also agrees with Shelley that "institutions make us what we are, and to free us from their shackles is to liberate virtue and unleash genius."⁷⁷ She dramatizes the despotic evils of aristocracy, wealth, organized religion, and politics as perpetuators of man's alienation from man. But although Mary Shelley strongly denounces social institutions in her work, she refrains from pursuing the idea that the perfection of man can be realized by the complete abolition of

⁷⁵Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 209.

⁷⁶Brailsford, p. 70.

⁷⁷Brailsford, p. 164.

institutions. Pessimistically, she implies that "social reform will occur, and incidentally the reformers will be corrupted and further reforms will be necessary."⁷⁸

Godwin, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley alike abhorred the abuses perpetrated by the favoured few. They felt that "nowhere is a man valued for what he is."⁷⁹ Mary Shelley envisions the loss of self-worth and dignity when man is made to suffer under the abuses of the aristocracy. Dozens of characters in her novels are either directly or indirectly alienated from human kind by the arbitrary system which perpetuates wealth. Mathilda's father learns no restraint because "born in affluence, and always prosperous, [he] clombe without the difficulty and various disappointments that all human beings seem destined to encounter."⁸⁰ Raymond in The Last Man "was the sole remnant of a noble but impoverished family." Ambitious from youth, "his first wish was aggrandisement; and the means that led towards this end were secondary considerations."⁸² Both men alienate themselves from those most loved because their lives are corrupted by the "love of distinction [which]. .. attends wealth."⁸³

⁷⁸Spark, p. 150.

⁷⁹Brailsford, p. 70.

⁸⁰Shelley, Mathilda, p. 6.

⁸¹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 27.

⁸²Shelley, The Last Man, p. 27.

⁸³Brailsford, p. 95

This same corruption which destroys individuals also destroys families. "Blood is not water, it is said, but gold... dearer far than the ties of Nature."⁸⁴ Edwin Raby is dismissed from his family when he wishes to marry a girl of his own choice, but of a class beneath him. The Countess of Windsor "cherished a love of power,"⁸⁵ and her only desire in life was to see her son Adrian regain the crown his father had given away. She alienates her son from her because her love of power blinds her to his virtues. She also alienates her daughter Idris by refusing to accept Idris' husband, Lionel Verney, who is a commoner. She refuses to speak to Verney even when the world is dying of the plague. "She fancied that she sacrificed her happiness to immutable principle."⁸⁶

Furthermore, pursuit of luxury creates artificial morality and fear. In Frankenstein Mary Shelley reveals the shock of the Monster when

The strange system of human society was explained to [him. . . He] heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty, of rank, descent, and noble blood . . . [He] learned that the possessions most esteemed by [human beings] were high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these advantages, but without either he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few. 87

⁸⁴Shelley, Falkner, I, 25.

⁸⁵Shelley, The Last Man, p. 13.

⁸⁶Shelley, The Last Man, p. 212.

⁸⁷Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 114.

Longing to be accepted, the Monster faces the poor family in whose house he had hidden for so long. But the family, horrified by his appearance, runs in terror from him. Mary Shelley understands the "tragedy of the creature who is born with a different face, who can find no secure place in society."⁸⁸

Falkner also suffers from "that vast system of imposture with which the strong oppressed the weak."⁸⁹ Like Frankenstein's monster, Falkner "grew not to believe in love or beauty; or if [his] heart opened to it-it was to wonder how all the perceptive and sentient in this wondrous fabric of the universe was instinct with injury and wrong."⁹⁰ Because he suffers from an unjust society, he "felt he could never more link himself in love or friendship to any."⁹¹

Mary Shelley, like her father and Shelley, not only hated the tyranny of the class system which degraded man, she also extended her hatred of tyranny "to include its manifestation in the church, Protestant or Catholic."⁹² She felt that the teachers of religion exert a tremendous power, "a power of good, if rightly directed, or of incalculable mischief if fanaticism or intolerance guided their efforts."⁹³

⁸⁸Nitchie, p. 148.

⁸⁹Shelley, Falkner, II, 184.

⁹⁰Shelley, Falkner, II, 184.

⁹¹Shelley, Falkner, I, 76.

⁹²Nitchie, p. 40.

⁹³Shelley, The Last Man, p. 273.

Godwin condemns Christianity because of its "doctrine of eternal punishment" and because such doctrine "denies the goodness of God."⁹⁴ Shelley refutes organized religion because it uses "God to sanctify persecution."⁹⁵ All three denounce the God of the Christians as a tyrant.⁹⁶

Mary Shelley, like Godwin, visualizes the effect of the doctrine of eternal damnation expounded by organized religion as "cruel and demoralizing," one which "saps the character where really believed and renders the mind which receives it as servile and pusillanimous."⁹⁷ In Falkner, Mr. Raby, believing his Catholic faith to be the faith of the chosen few, denounces his son who had forsaken the Catholic faith. He also rejects his son's child because she has been reared an infidel:

We cannot look with favour on the child of an apostate; educated in a faith which we consider pernicious. ⁹⁸

The Raby family feels their religion is a privilege; they enjoy their martyrdom in a Protestant country. Their son, Edwin Raby, is an outcast "from the moment that he renounced his religion," and "his name was never mentioned; and his death hailed as a piece of good fortune, that freed his family from a living disgrace."⁹⁹

⁹⁴Brailsford, p. 92

⁹⁵Brailsford, p. 161.

⁹⁶Brailsford, p. 131.

⁹⁷Brailsford, p. 130.

⁹⁸Shelley, Falkner, II, 116.

⁹⁹Shelley, Falkner, III, 76-77.

Furthermore, Mary Shelley realizes that fear, "the parent of religion,"¹⁰⁰ lulls the senses with false hope, causing alienation of man from man by stressing the importance of the heavenly world over the earthly world. In The Last Man, during the final days before the death of all England, Lionel Verney, upon hearing the organ in Westminster Abbey, enters and listens to the religious chant "which spoke peace and hope to the unhappy."¹⁰¹ For one moment he felt that perhaps "the Creator looked down in compassion and promise of relief,"¹⁰² but suddenly one of the choristers fell dead, and he knew there was no relief there. In the same novel, an eclipse occurs during the last days, which frightens everyone senseless. They fear God more than they fear the plague. The Moslems fill the mosques, and the "christians sought their churches;"¹⁰³ Mecca was filled with pilgrims:

. . .and, though the dead multiplied, and the streets of Ispahan, of Pekin, and of Delhi were strewn with pestilence-struck corpses, men passed on, gazing on the ominous sky, regardless of the death beneath their feet. 104

¹⁰⁰Shelley, The Last Man, p. 85.

¹⁰¹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 205

¹⁰²Shelley, The Last Man, p. 205.

¹⁰³Shelley, The Last Man, P. 163.

¹⁰⁴Shelley, The Last Man, p. 163.

Mary Shelley also shows in her work that the fear bred by organized religion produces political tyrants who control the minds of large masses of people,¹⁰⁵ dividing friend from friend by creating a concept of special privilege for the chosen few. The Methodist in The Last Man is portrayed as a religious fanatic whose father had also been a minister, who by his "pernicious doctrines of election and special grace had contributed to destroy all conscientious feeling in his son":¹⁰⁶

. . . the preacher was as cautious and prudent as he was cruel. His victims lived under the strictest rules and laws, which either entirely imprisoned them. . . or let them out in such numbers, and under such leaders, as precluded the possibility of controversy. . . 107

The preacher's power is based on fear: "election, sin, and red right arm of God."¹⁰⁸ His converts believe so strongly in their righteousness that they are willing to wage war against the disbelievers even when the whole world is dying of the plague. One of the preacher's converts is Juliet, a friend of Lionel Verney. An "easy prey" for the Methodist because of her tragic life, she has one desire: to save her child from the plague. She chooses the way of the preacher, and her fanaticism severs her from her friends, who could have protected her and comforted her, for they were all doomed to die anyway.

¹⁰⁵Spark, 160.

¹⁰⁶Shelley, The Last Man, p. 274.

¹⁰⁷Shelley, The Last Man, p. 282.

¹⁰⁸Shelley, The Last Man, p. 278.

Mary Shelley asserts that the preacher's power is "founded on fear,"¹⁰⁹ and she deduces that his power is the same as the politician's power:

It is a strange fact, but incontestible, that the philanthropist, who ardent in his desire to do good, who patient, reasonable and gentle, yet disdains to use other arguments than trust, has less influence over men's minds, than he who, grasping and selfish, refuses not to adopt any means, nor awaken any passion nor diffuse any falsehood, for the advancement of his cause. 110

Social institutions directed by such self-seeking men and based on fear and special privilege erase or deform natural human desires:

The English are generous to their friends, but they are never kind to strangers; the tie of brotherhood, which Christ taught us uniting all mankind is unacknowledged by them. They so fear that their sullen fireside would be unduly invaded, and so expect to be ill treated, that each man makes a Martello tower of his home, and keeps watch against the gentler charities of life, as from an invading enemy. 111

Falkner while a soldier in India attempts to "enlighten one or two native princes,"¹¹² but the English government wants to keep these people subservient for its own gain. Adrian in The Last Man is wounded in an attempt to save a Greek girl from being attacked by her own soldiers, and Adrian mourns the despicable qualities to

¹⁰⁹Spark, p. 160

¹¹⁰Shelley, The Last Man,

¹¹¹Shelley, Falkner, II, 150.

¹¹²Shelley, Falkner, II, 215.

which the individual man is sunk in pursuit of wars perpetrated by governments for their own gain:

I have learnt. . . that one man, more or less is of small import, while human bodies remain to fill up the thinned ranks of the soldiery; and that the identity of an individual may be overlooked, so that the muster roll contains its full numbers. 113.

For Mary Shelley war is for the "tyrant's gain," the breeding ground of which is luxury and affluence.¹¹⁴ Like Godwin and Shelley, Mary Shelley feels "it is flagrant immorality that one man should have the power to dispose of the produce of another man's toils, yet to maintain this power is the main concern of police and legislation."¹¹⁵ Such immorality in society perpetuates and intensifies man's natural isolation.

Though Mary Shelley's ideas thus coincide with the rational philosophies of Godwin and Shelley, it is clear that her goal is not, like theirs, the perfection of man. Her goal is rather to refute the idea of the perfection of man and to pursue the concept of the isolation of the human spirit. In The Last Man she relentlessly denies the concept of human perfection:

Dreaming, for ever dreaming. . . Be assured that earth is not, nor ever can be heaven, while the seeds of hell are native to her soil. When the seasons have become equal, when the air breeds no disorders, when its surface is no longer liable to blights, and droughts, then sickness will ease; when man's passions are dead, poverty will depart. When love is no longer akin to hate, then brotherhood will exist. 116

¹¹³Shelley, The Last Man, p. 116.

¹¹⁴Nitchie, p. 43.

¹¹⁵Brailsford, p. 96.

When the world is dying, Adrian who is an idealized version of Shelley¹¹⁷ takes command, but still the strong kill the weak. The Irish, joined by wandering bands of Americans, pillage the death-laden countryside. When there are only a few people left in the world, they still fight for supremacy among themselves:

Mankind, if faced with a common danger. . . will band together with an appearance of common virtue, but within this decreasing community, the strong will exploit the weak to the very end. 118

The organizationless society Godwin envisions seems to exist in The Last Man, but Mary Shelley shows that her father's rational goals are finally illusory. The simple community of the remaining survivors on earth in The Last Man are divided into groups headed by individuals who lead each group. Adrian, the ideal man, leads all the groups. Whatever good he brought would not have been possible without logical organization, that is, the government of the ungoverned. Furthermore, when there are only four people left on earth, Adrian, Lionel Verney, his son, and Clara, and government no longer exists, and the plague had run its course, still Verney's son dies of typhoid fever.

Mary Shelley projects the image of the perfect society to its cruel end. When only three people exist, the boat in which they are riding capsizes, and Lionel Verney is the only

¹¹⁷Spark, p. 152.

¹¹⁸Spark, p. 150.

survivor. Now, the world has reached perfection. No government exists to tyrannize the populace; wealth and opulence is of no consequence; religion offers no solution; one man lives. Mary Shelley reduces the philosophies of Shelley and Godwin to the bare bones, and her conclusion is the same as before: man is an isolated being; loneliness and the grave are the only conditions about which he can be sure.

Chapter III

Man's Alienation from God

Mary Shelley's concept of man's isolated condition, based on her personal experience and defined clearly in her work, extends to include man's isolation from God. Her study of this devastating isolation probes the injustice and indifference of the driving force in the universe. Against the injustice, the "divine oppression,"¹ man rebels and ultimately is alienated from God; Mary Shelley uses the ambiguous Promethean myth to symbolize this alienation. In her attempt to understand the indifferent force in the universe, Mary Shelley transforms Godwin's rational concept of a friendly but indifferent God into the pessimistic "law of Necessity" which represents total alienation of man from God.

In pursuing the concept of man's alienation from God, Mary Shelley does not necessarily expound atheism or disbelief in a divine being. On the contrary, even though none of her fictional characters attend church, many of them express belief in a "natural religion."² Personally, she found comfort in the idea of being reunited with Shelley, after death, and like Shelley, "she admired the basic teachings of Jesus and respected true religious feeling."³ However, she distrusted organized religion and its powers over the masses.⁴

¹Spark, p. 135.

²Nitchie, p. 40.

³Nitchie, p. 41.

Mary Shelley's concept of man's alienation from God evolves in part from the ambivalence of the Promethean myth, which had intrigued her since the early days with Shelley and Byron in Switzerland.⁵ The myth has been devastating for man in most versions. Aeschylus perceives Prometheus as the champion of mankind, but guilty of pride, a figure who rebels against the tyranny of his god.⁶ His "benevolence toward humanity was hardly sufficient recompense for the alienation of man from heaven that he brought about."⁷ The Prometheus figure is read as an "analogue of the crucified Christ" as well as a "type of Lucifer, a son of light justly cast out by an offended heaven."⁸ Another aspect of the myth comes from Ovid who sees Prometheus as the creator:

Whether with particles of heav'nly fire,
 The God of Nature did his soul inspire;
 Or earth, but new divided from the sky
 And, pliant, still retain'd th'ethereal energy;
 Which wise Prometheus temper'd into paste,
 And, mix's with living streams, the godlike image
 caste. . . .
 From such rude principles our form began;
 And earth was metamorphos'd into man.⁹

Mary Shelley's interest in the ambiguities of the Promethean myth is revealed either directly or indirectly in Mathilda, Falkner, Frankenstein Or, The Modern Prometheus, and The Last Man.

⁵Bloom, p. 222.

⁶Aeschylus, The Prometheus Bound, ed. George Thomson (London: University Press, 1932), p. 6.

⁷Bloom, p. 214.

⁸Bloom, p. 214.

⁹Pollin, p. 102.

Like the Monster, who was driven "from joy for no misdeed,"¹⁰ Mathilda feels the injustice of her guilt caused by her father's unnatural and incestuous desires for her:

. . .I disobeyed no command, I ate no apple. . .
Alas! my companion did, and I was precipitated in his fall. 11

Falkner recognizes the injustice of Alithea's marriage to Neville. He rebels, and his faith in a benevolent god is forever destroyed:

. . .something departed from the world, such as I had once known it, never to return again. A sense of acquiescence in the decrees of Providence, of confidence in the benevolence and beauty of the universe. . .all departed! 12

Falkner, like Prometheus, refuses to give in to the will of fate which decreed that he should lose Alithea:

A contempt for the order of the universe, a stern demoniacal braving of fate, because I would rule, and put that right which God had let go wrong. 13

His rebellion against the order of the universe over which he has no control causes him to lose Alithea, and he never ceases to suffer because he causes her death. His suffering reaches its climax while he is in prison:

. . .he might have served for a model of Prometheus--the vulture at his heart producing pangs and spasms of physical suffering; but his will unconquered--his mind refusing to acknowledge the bondage to which his body was the prey. 14

¹⁰Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 95.

¹¹Shelley, Mathilda, p. 16.

¹²Shelley, Falkner, II, 230.

¹³Shelley, Falkner, II, 232.

¹⁴Shelley, Falkner, III, 128-129.

Merrival in The Last Man is another Promethean figure who rebels against the decrees of fate. Devoted to optimistic forecasts of a perfect world to come, he neglects the present world. Abruptly he is brought back to reality by the death of his wife and children, victims of the plague. He destroys his astronomical instruments and all his calculations and prophecies of the golden future. His faith in a benevolent god is destroyed. He struggles vainly against the finality of death:

. . . in an universe of cowards I dare think--among the church-yard tombs--among the victims of his merciless tyranny I dare reproach the Supreme Evil. How can he punish me? Let him bare his arm and transfix me with lightning--this is also one of his attributes. . . I do no fear His hell, for I have it here. . . 15

The agony of Idris in The Last Man when she realizes that she and all those she loves will be destroyed by the plague represents the torment of man's helplessness in a world he cannot comprehend:

. . . she compared this gnawing of sleepless expectation of evil, to the vulture that fed on the heart of Prometheus; under the influence of this external excitement, and of the interminable struggles she endured to combat and conceal it, she felt, she said, as if all the wheels and springs of the animal machine worked at double rate and were fast consuming themselves. 16

¹⁵Shelley, The Last Man, p. 221.

¹⁶Shelley, The Last Man, p. 219.

The plague which destroys all men except one in The Last Man is the ultimate injustice over which man has no control.

Lionel Verney struggles to understand the magnitude of the invisible death:

O death and change, rulers of our life, where are ye, that I may grapple with you! What was there in our tranquillity, that excited your envy--in our happiness, that ye should destroy it? We were happy, loving and beloved; the horn of Amalthea contained no blessing unshowered upon us, but, alas!

Importunate fortune,
the barbarous deity,
today a cadaver and yesterday a flower,
forever changes. 17

Lionel Verney recognizes the vengeance of God in the devastation of the plague, and he again mirrors the Promethean myth when he cries out against such injustice:

. . . we were enchained to the car of fate, over whose coursers we had no control. We could no longer say, This we will do and this we will leave undone. A mightier power than the human was at hand to destroy our plans or to achieve the work we avoided. It were madness to calculate upon another winter. This was our last. The coming summer was the extreme end of our vista; and, when we arrived there, instead of a continuation of the long road, a gulph yawned, into which we must of force be precipitated. The last blessing of humanity was wrested from us; we might no longer hope. Can the wretch, led to the scaffold who when he lays his head on the block marks the double shadow of himself and the executioner, whose uplifted arms bears the axe, hope? Can the shipwrecked mariner, who spent with swimming, hears close behind the splashing waters

¹⁷Shelley, The Last Man, p. 186 (translation Calderon de la Barca).

divided by a shark which pursues him through the Atlantic, hope? Such hope as theirs, we also may entertain!

Old fables tell us, that this gentle spirit sprung from the box of Pandora, else crammed with evils; but these were unseen and null, while all admired the inspiring loveliness of young Hope: each man's heart became her home: she was enthroned sovereign of our lives, here and here-after; she was deified and worshipped, declared incorruptible and everlasting. But like all the other gifts of the Creator to man, she is mortal; her life has attained its last hour. . . . Hope is dead! 18

The complete futility of a struggle against the plague is reflected in Lionel Verney's acceptance of man as the victim:

Once man was a favourite of the Creator. . . . Once it was so; now is man lord of the creation? Look at him--ha! I see plague! She has invested his form, is incarnate in his flesh, has entwined herself with his being, and blinds his heaven-seeking eyes. Lie down, O man, on the flower-strown earth; give up all claim to your inheritance, all you can ever possess of it is this small cell which the dead require. 19

The concept of the helplessness of man in an unjust universe is further illustrated in Mary Shelley's terse comments upon the uselessness of life. In Falkner when the grave diggers uncover the rotted corpse of Alithea, they recognize their own fate:

. . . while each beholder, as they contemplated so much beauty and excellence reduced to a small heap of bones, abhorrant to the eye, imbibed a heart-felt lesson on the nothingness of life. 20

18 Shelley, The Last Man, p. 226.

19 Shelley, The Last Man, p. 230.

20 Shelley, Falkner, III, 53.

And in The Last Man the body of Raymond, charred and ragged, is carried out of the dead city of Stamboul; he too is a symbol of the futility of man's hopes and aspirations:

. . . the cypress waved high above, their death-liked gloom accorded with his state of nothingness. 21

It is, of course, Frankenstein which most clearly exemplifies "the motif of revolt against divine oppression, and . . . the concept of a benevolent deity."²² The epigraph sets the theme of the human condition as it parallels Adam's in Paradise Lost, and thereby makes the myth of Prometheus applicable to all men:

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

The entire book explores man's struggle against and isolation from God. The three main characters in Frankenstein, Walton, the Monster, and Frankenstein, all reveal Promethean qualities. Walton, based upon Coleridge's "demonic figure of the Ancient Mariner. . . , the purgatorial self trapped in the isolation of a heightened self consciousness. . . is himself a Promethean quester."²³ Descendant of Cain, he is pursued by his "consciousness of guilt."²⁴ The Monster is an "unwilling serpent

²¹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 150.

²²Spark, p. 135.

²³Bloom, p. 218.

²⁴Bloom, p. 219.

or Cain."²⁵ A reiteration of the ambiguity of the Promethean myth as he complains to his creator:

You accuse me of murder, and yet you would with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. 26

The Promethean creator, Frankenstein, at first desires to save mankind and to usurp God:

Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. 27.

Like Ovid's Prometheus, Frankenstein "collected the instruments of life around [him] that [he] might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at [his] feet."²⁸ But later, when Frankenstein realizes his mistake, he desires to "extinguish that life which [he] so thoughtlessly bestowed."²⁹

Mary Shelley further compounds the Promethean myth because as soon as he comes to life, the Monster takes on the Promethean role. His solitary condition ("...but am I not alone, miserably alone?"), and his revolt against his maker "establish his Promethean features."³⁰ The Monster's power

²⁵Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," Yale Review, 52 (1963), p. 248.

²⁶Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 96.

²⁷Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 52.

²⁸Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 52.

²⁹Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 88.

³⁰Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 96.

over his creator further complicates the Promethean myth. When Frankenstein refuses to create a mate for the Monster, the Monster cries, "You are my creator, but I am your master; obey!"³²

Mary Shelley exploits the ambiguities of the Promethean myth in Frankenstein and in her other novels in order to symbolize the fundamental injustice in the universe and among men, and in Frankenstein, "between man and God."³³ But paradoxically, there is no distinct source of this injustice. Mary Shelley, unlike her husband, who saw "Frankenstein, in his role as creator, as the perpetrator of human misery and therefore an object of hatred," sees Frankenstein as an "amoral product of nature, on whom no responsibility can be attached, towards whom no passion can logically be entertained."³⁴ This paradox then brings the whole weight of her philosophy in Frankenstein and in her other novels to rest upon the inexplicable solitude of man over which he has no control.

Mary Shelley's philosophy of man's isolation symbolized by the complex Promethean myth is further illuminated by comparison with Shelley's ideas in Prometheus Unbound. Shelley portrays in Prometheus Unbound the overthrow of Jupiter and

³¹Spark, p. 134.

³²Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 160.

³³Milton A. Mays, "Frankenstein, Mary Shelley's Black Theodicy," Southern Humanities Review, 3, No. 2 (Spring, 1969), p. 153.

³⁴Spark, p. 139.

the ultimate unity between heaven, nature, and the mind of man with the reunion of Prometheus and Asia.³⁵ But Mary Shelley's concept of man's isolation does not include such a union. In Frankenstein, the Monster is in the "Archetypal situation of the Romantic Wanderer or Solitary;" however, he finds no release in telling his story.³⁶ His desire for a "mate is clearly an attempt to find a Shelleyan Epipsyche, . . . a self within the self."³⁷ However, his only double is "his creator and denier."³⁸ Mary Shelley's other characters are also solitaires destined never to find their Epipsyches. Mathilda is forever divided from her father. Falkner is forever divided from Alithea. In The Last Man, Perdita and Raymond and Evadne form a unique and destructive triangle which is never resolved. Merrival loses his wife and children. Adrian is doomed never to find his other self:

. . . the sensitive and excellent Adrian, loving all, and beloved by all, yet seemed destined not to find the half of himself. . . 39

³⁵ Carl Grabo, Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation (Chapel Hills: North Carolina Press, 1935), p. 49.

³⁶ Bloom, p. 221.

³⁷ Bloom, p. 222.

³⁸ Bloom, p. 222.

³⁹ Shelley, The Last Man, p. 65.

Lionel Verney loses Idris, Adrian, and the whole world.

Mary Shelley compounds the Promethean sufferings of her characters by not allowing them to find a unity within themselves through which they might find a unity with the moving force in the universe.

The optimism in Shelley's work is never found in his wife's novels. Harold Bloom contends that the Romantics "like to return to the imagery of the ocean" as a symbol of immortality and a "hoped-for process of restoration."⁴⁰ But Mary Shelley reverses the image to symbolize estrangement and therefore reinforces her philosophy of man's isolation. By ending Frankenstein in a world of ice, Mary Shelley denies the possibility of a rebirth. The three lonely figures are trapped in a frozen wasteland. In the other four novels, Mary Shelley reveals the same pessimistic estrangement. Mathilda's father drowns in the sea, as does Falkner's Alitheia. The last victim of the plague in The Last Man is buried in the ice mountains of Switzerland. Adrian and Clara drown in the Mediterranean. Lionel Verney, the last man, when he realizes that he is the last man cries:

No! no! a God rules the world-providence has not exchanged its golden sceptre for an aspic's sting. Away! let me fly from the ocean-grave, let me depart from this barren nook, paled in, as it is from access by its own desolateness; let me tread once again the paved towns; step over the threshold of man's dwellings, and most certainly I shall find this thought a horrible vision--a maddening, but evanescent dream. ⁴¹

⁴⁰Bloom, p. 222.

⁴¹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 327.

But Lionel Verney returns to the sea, "To that water--cause of his woes, perhaps now to be their cure."⁴² His return to the sea in search of survivors of the plague offers an interesting paradox:

I form no expectation of alteration for the better; but the monotonous present is intolerable to me. Neither hope nor joy are my pilots--restless despair and fierce desire to change lead me on. I long to grapple with danger, to be excited by fear, to have some task, however, slight or voluntary, for each day's fulfilment. I shall witness all the variety of appearance, that the elements can assume--I shall read fair augury in the rainbow--menace in the cloud--some lesson or record dear to my heart in everything. Thus around the shores of deserted earth, while the sun is high, and the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold the tiny bark, freighted with Verney--the LAST MAN. 43

Verney returns to the sea, the traditional image of rebirth, without hope. For him, the sea is the final image of estrangement.

In addition to the motif of rebellion against divine oppression which alienates man from God, Mary Shelley utilizes the concept of an indifferent God which represents the ultimate alienation for man. Earlier, Godwin had set forth in Political Justice the idea of a rational driving force within the universe:

We have here a secure alliance, a friend that so far as the system of things extends will never desert us, unhearing, inaccessible to importunity, uncapricious, without passions, without favor, affection, or partiality, that maketh its sun to rise on the evil and the good and its rain to descend on the just and the unjust. 44

⁴²Shelley, The Last Man, p. 341.

⁴³Shelley, The Last Man, p. 342.

Though she accepts Godwin's definition in the main, Mary Shelley does not always portray the indifferent driving force as necessarily "a friend."

One of the results of Mary Shelley's philosophy of an indifferent God is that she denies the possibility of a benevolent nature.⁴⁵ Unlike other Romantics, especially Wordsworth, Mary Shelley sees in nature a symbol of indifference. For example, when Falkner lies dying of his wounds in Greece,

Elizabeth gazed for a moment from the casement to see how moved the stars. . . the southern night reigned in all its beauty-the stars hung refulgent lamps in the transparent ether-the fire-flies darted and wheeled among the olive groves or rested in the myrtle hedges, flashing intermittingly, and filling for an instant a small space around them with fairy brightness; each form of tree, of rocky fragment, and broken upland, lay in calm and beautiful repose; she turned to the low couch on which lay all her hope-her idolized father. . . 46

The universe speeds on regardless of man's sufferings. In Frankenstein, the frozen north and the icy majesty of Mont Blanc symbolize nature's innocence and indifference.⁴⁷ The "ironic indifference"⁴⁸ of nature is also evident in The Last Man when Mary Shelley describes the end of the world. She foreshadows

⁴⁵Nelson, p. 248.

⁴⁶Shelley, Falkner, I, 187.

⁴⁷Nelson, p. 248.

⁴⁸Nelson, p. 253.

T. S. Eliot's lines, "This is the way the world ends/Not with a bang but a whimper,"⁴⁹ with her description of the final tragedy of man:

Here you not the rushing sound of the coming temp-
test? Do you not behold the cloud open, and destruc-
tion lurid and dire pour down on the blasted earth?
See you not the thunderbolt fall, and are deafened
by the sound of heaven that follows its descent?
Feel you not the earth quake and open with agonizing
groans, while the air is pregnant with shrieks and
wailings,--all announcing the last days of man?

No! none of these things accompanied our fall!
The balmy air of spring, breathed from nature's
ambrosial home, invested the lovely earth, which
wakened as a young mother about to lead forth in
pride her beauteous offspring to meet their sire who
had been long absent. The buds decked the trees, the
flowers adorned the land: the dark branches swollen
with seasonable juices, expanded into leaves, and
the variegated foliage of spring bending and singing
in the breeze, rejoiced in the genial warmth of the
unclouded empyrean: the brooks flowered murmuring,
the sea was waveless . . . Our enemy, like the
calamity of Homer, trod our hearts, and no sound was
echoed from her steps-- 50

In addition to the indifference of nature, Mary Shelley also reveals the deceptive qualities of nature. After Falkner decides to release Alitheia so that she may return to her family, he views the beauties of nature:

⁴⁹T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," Modern American Poetry, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1958), p. 396.

⁵⁰Shelley, The Last Man, p. 229.

To the east each crag and precipice, each vast mountain top, showed in dark relief against the golden eastern sky; seaward the horizon was misty from the gale, and the ocean stretched out illimitably; . . . It was a desolate, but magnificent spectacle, and my throbbing heart was in universe with its vast grandeurs. I blessed sea and wind, and heaven, and the dawn; the guilt of my soul had passed from me. . . all again was well. 51

But moments later, Alitheia drowns, and Falkner's sufferings begin.

Nature is also deceptive in Frankenstein. Frankenstein decides to marry Elizabeth despite the Monster's warning. Elizabeth and Frankenstein both have premonitions of coming evil, but they are lulled into tranquility by the beautiful scenery they pass while en route to their honeymoon home. Elizabeth remarks on the beauties of nature:

Observe how fast we move along and how the clouds, which sometimes obscure and sometimes rise above the dome of Mont Blanc, render this scene of beauty still more interesting. Look also at the innumerable fish that are swimming in the clear waters, where we can distinguish every pebble that lies at the bottom. What a divine day! How happy and serene all nature appears! 52

Hours later, the Monster attacks Elizabeth, and destroys the "best hope and purest creature of earth,"⁵³ a reminder that nature does not always reflect the sufferings of man.

⁵¹Shelley, Falkner, II, 274-275.

⁵²Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 183.

⁵³Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 186.

Furthermore, Mary Shelley sees that nature, indifferent to the pain of man, is also unresponsive to man's prayers. "The awful majesty of Mont Blanc,"⁵⁴ the place where the Monster and Frankenstein meet for the first time, is reminiscent of Shelley's "Mont Blanc," a reminder that "the force, or power, is there, behind or within the mountain, but its external workings upon us are either indifferent or malevolent, and this power is not to be prayed to."⁵⁵ The power in the world is indifferent to the prayers or the sufferings of man. For example, Falkner prays that Alitheawill be restored. He "thanked God"; he "felt happy,"⁵⁶ but Alitheas dies anyway. Mathilda begs God to allow her father to live, but he drowns before she can ask for forgiveness. Lionel Verney prays for the world to live. He refuses to believe that "the best work of God"⁵⁷ is to be destroyed. The world dies. Worshippers visit Westminster Abbey during the plague to pray for deliverance, but during the prayers,

Suddenly one of the choristers died--he was lifted from his desk, the vaults below were hastily opened--he was consigned with a few muttered prayers to the darksome cavern, abode of thousands who had gone before. 58

⁵⁴Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 94.

⁵⁵Bloom, p. 216.

⁵⁶Shelley, Falkner, II, 271.

⁵⁷Shelley, The Last Man, p. 189.

⁵⁸Shelley, The Last Man, p. 205.

This idea of man's inability to control his destiny is not to be construed as the juvenile moanings of one who wishes to have his own way. For Mary Shelley, the concept of man's limited control over his destiny is basic to her philosophy of man's isolation. Though certain critics have said that the "menacing force" symbolized by the plague in The Last Man is a product of an industrial civilization destroyed by science,⁵⁹ Mary Shelley does not envision a mechanistic world in The Last Man. She envisions a world attempting to become a better world. The plague which destroys the world is outside of man, and he has absolutely no control over the outcome. What then is the answer to living in a world over which we have no control? For Mary Shelley, the answer is acceptance.

Acceptance of the will of the power of the universe rests partially upon accepting the innocence of nature and its reliance upon the same power as man. Thomas Hardy describes such philosophy in "Waiting Both":

A star looks down at me,
And says: "Here I and you
Stand, each in our degree:
What do you mean to do--
Mean to do?"

⁵⁹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 205.

I say: "For all I know,
 Wait, and let Time go by,
 Till my change come. - "Just so,"
 The star says: "So mean I -
 So mean I." 60

Mary Shelley describes such acceptance with the words of Idris in The Last Man who sees in the stars man's condition:

Its vacillating effulgence seems to say that its state
 even like ours upon earth, is wavering and inconstant;
 it fears, methinks, and it loves. 61

Alitheia, in Falkner, also recognizes that man's destiny is uncontrolled, and the only answer then is to accept the control:

. . . we do not live to be happy, but to
 perform our duties. 62

Raymond also recognizes man's lack of control over his destiny in The Last Man:

We are born; we choose neither our parents, nor our
 station; we are educated by others, or by the world's
 circumstances, and this cultivation, mingling with our
 innate dispositions, is the soil in which our desires,
 passions, and motives grow. 63

To recognize how little control we have over our destinies is to perceive our ultimate alienation from God. The only answer then is acceptance, and in accepting our condition we are forever estranged from a meaningful relationship with our creator. Mathilda submits to uncontrolled destiny:

⁶⁰Thomas Hardy, "Waiting Both," Modern British Poetry, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1958), p. 35.

⁶¹Shelley, The Last Man, p. 58.

⁶²Shelley, Falkner II, 243.

⁶³Shelley, The Last Man, p. 47.

My fate has been governed by necessity, a hideous necessity. It required hands stronger than mine; Stronger I do believe than any human force to break the thick, adamant chain that has bound me. . . . 64

Falkner also submits:

Man and all his works were but a plaything in the hands of Omnipotence, and to that Falkner submitted his destiny. 65

Frankenstein's monster is also a victim of destiny when he murders Frankenstein's family:

I knew that I was preparing for myself a deadly torture, but I was the slave, not the master of an impulse which I detested yet could not disobey. 66

Such acceptance denies a cause and effect relationship with the controlling force in the universe. If man cannot control his destiny, then he by nature is a slave to circumstance. Indifferent fate is his master, and there is no Court of Appeals, no interchange of philosophy, no communication between man and God. Mary Shelley envisions a world of injustice-injustice between men, and injustice between men and God intensified by an indifference which denies man release from his solitude. Like Oceanus in Prometheus Bound,

⁶⁴ Shelley, Mathilda, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Shelley, Falkner, III, 257.

⁶⁶ Shelley, Frankenstein, p. 208.

Mary Shelley recognizes the basic injustice and even the
 tyranny of God, and she resigns herself to it.⁶⁷

Lionel Verney, considered by many critics to be the mask
 of Mary Shelley herself,⁶⁸ articulates the philosophy of
 stoic acceptance in The Last Man. The plague has come closer
 and closer, and Verney's terror becomes physical. His "knees
 knocked together, [his] teeth chattered;"⁶⁹ he is sick to his
 very soul. "A sense of degradation"⁷⁰ sweeps over him. "Was
 he of no more account to his Maker, than a field of corn
 blighted in the ear?"⁷¹

Sudden an internal voice, articulate and clear, seemed
 to say:--Thus from eternity, it was decreed: the steeds
 that bear Time onwards had this hour and this fulfillment
 enchained to them, since the void brought forth its
 burthen. Would you read backwards the unchangeable laws
 of Necessity?

Mother of the world! Servant of the Omnipotent!
 eternal changeless Necessity! who with busy fingers
 sittests ever weaving the indissoluble chain of events!--
 I will not murmur at thy acts. If my human mind cannot
 acknowledge that all that is, is right; yet since what
 is, must be, I will sit amidst the ruins and smile. 72

⁶⁷ Aeschylus, p. 6.

⁶⁸ Spark, p. 152.

⁶⁹ Shelley, The Last Man, p. 290.

⁷⁰ Shelley, The Last Man, p. 290.

⁷¹ Shelley, The Last Man, p. 290.

⁷² Shelley, The Last Man, pp. 290-291.

Conclusion

Mary Shelley's concept of the isolation of the human spirit originates first in her own life. The loss of her mother, the lack of unity within her family and, most of all, her confused relationship with her father contributed to her sense of isolation. Her marriage to Shelley and the deep tragedies they suffered only intensified her feelings of personal loneliness. The insecurity she experienced in her youth must have been aggravated by her precarious and, in the eyes of society, reprehensible position in her early union with Shelley. She felt deeply her rejection by family and friends after her union with the poet.

Her illness during the five pregnancies she experienced in the eight years she and Shelley were together contributed to her sense of loneliness. When she could not be with Shelley during these times, or when her depression caused by these illnesses made her a poor companion, he sought companionship from his friends and Claire, and later from Emilia Viviani and Jane Williams. She must have felt that Shelley often gave priority to his relationships with his friends rather than to his own family. The death of their children and the difficulties she experienced in her marriage created a "despondent pessimism"¹ which further alienated her from her friends and Shelley. After Shelley's

¹Spark, p. 61.

death, Mary retreated further into her lonely life. She wrote in her journal:

December 2 [1834]--Loneliness has been the curse of my life. . . 2

Mary Shelley's continuous exposure to the idealistic philosophies of Shelley and Godwin, combined with her own experiences, contributed to her concept of the isolation of the human spirit. She felt keenly the barriers between the minds of men, and she projected her awareness of these barriers into the characters she created in her fiction. The people in her fiction are lonely people whose backgrounds reveal their isolation from human companionship, and their natural environments contribute to their sense of isolation. She delves into her characters' inner conflicts and their search for completion and understanding in a world which Mary Shelley sees as devoid of completion and understanding. In addition, she utilizes the idealistic philosophies of Shelley and Godwin to show that society perpetuates man's isolation, but, unlike Shelley and Godwin, Mary Shelley sees no solution in the abolition of social institutions. Her pessimistic concept of man's isolation from man and his environment extends to include his isolation from God.

Mary Shelley envisions a world of man alienated from God by barriers as great as those which alienate man from man. She

²Nitchie, p. 13.

symbolizes these barriers by utilizing the ambiguities of the Promethean myth to intensify her concept of man's blind suffering in an incomprehensible universe. She further intensifies her concept of the barriers between man and God by revealing that nature is not benevolent; nature is in fact indifferent to the fate of man. Mary Shelley also intensifies her philosophy of man's isolation by revealing that man's search for unity in his own soul is futile, and her characters, doomed to search for this unity, finally can do nothing but accept the will of fate as ordained. In addition, Mary Shelley symbolizes man's futile search for himself and for meaning in the universe by reversing the archetypal symbol of the sea as an image of rebirth. Nature pictured as indifferent and unresponsive to the pain of man represents a projection of Godwin's idea of an indifferent, but friendly, driving force in the universe which Mary Shelley transforms into the "law of Necessity" the perception of which acknowledges man's total alienation from God. Mary Shelley completes her pessimistic viewpoint of man's isolation by assuming a stoic acceptance of the will of fate.

Critics imply that this emphasis on isolation in Mary Shelley's work is due primarily to her personal loneliness.⁴ Although Mary Shelley does concentrate in her fiction on the philosophy

³Nitchie, p. 16; Spark, pp. 152 and 165.

of human isolation which stems to a great degree from her own personal experiences, she was a professional writer, dedicated to the idea of the philosophical mind. She was not a closet author; she desired that her work be published. She writes of her ambition to Maria Gisborne:

I have sent my novel to Papa--I long to hear some news of it--as with an authors vanity I want to see it in print & hear the praises of my friends. . . 4

Furthermore, in a letter to Leigh Hunt she reveals she was always aspiring to write better:

. . . After all, Valperga is merely a book of promise, another landing place in the staircase I am climbing.⁵

After Shelley's death, Mary Shelley relied primarily on her writings to support herself and her son, Percy. In addition to Mathilda, Falkner, Frankenstein, and The Last Man, Mary Shelley also wrote three other novels: Valperga; Or The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca, Perkin Warbeck, and Lodore. She also contributed many short stories over a long period of time to The Keepsake. Furthermore, her propensity toward scholarly study is revealed in her "praiseworthy Lives,"⁶ a critical-biographical study of Italian, Spanish, and French literature, which was published in Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia.

⁴Shelley, Letters, I, 156.

⁵Shelley, Letters, I, 243.

⁶Spark, p. 126.

Her biographical studies reveal her "most concise and intellectual writing, effective for narrative, characterization or criticism."⁷ They reveal her scholarly acquisitions and in-depth evaluations at her best⁸ as well as her ability to "submerge herself in objective study."⁹ Her work as a critic is outstanding as her Notes to the 1839 edition of Shelley's poems prove. She also wrote travel books, History of a Six Week's Tour in 1817 and Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1844, as well as two plays, Prosperine and Midas and numerous poems. Most of her literary work was published, and most of it was popular during her own day.¹⁰

Of all Mary Shelley's work, however, The Lives, The Last Man, and Frankenstein Or, The Modern Prometheus are the most memorable. Nitchie claims The Last Man is Mary Shelley's "best work after Frankenstein," especially in the descriptive detail of the devastation of the plague as well as "intensity of incident" toward the close of the book.¹¹ The Last Man "defies classification of any acception fictional genre,"¹² and its most unique feature is "its fusion of fantasy with realism."¹³

⁷Nitchie, p. 195.

⁸Spark, p. 126.

⁹Spark, p. 103.

¹⁰Spark, pp. 125-127.

¹¹Nitchie, p.

¹²Spark, p. 157

¹³Spark, p. 158.

Frankenstein, however, is the novel most worthy of continued study. Frankenstein represents "for the first time in gothic fiction characters [which take on] full symbolic resonance of inner psychological reality."¹⁴ Furthermore, the structure of the plot is remarkable in its "symmetrical intricacy,"¹⁵ and Frankenstein's ironic pursuit of the Monster is a "stroke of genius."¹⁶ In addition, "the dominant and recurrent image" of the Romantic concept of "the shadow or double of the self" gives the novel "its latent power."¹⁷ Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and The Last Man deserve a place in the development of the novel. Both novels reveal an effort to enlarge and extend the novel as a literary genre.¹⁸

Mary Shelley's novels also reveal a movement away from Romantic idealism toward the pessimism of the late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century. Both Melville and Emily Brontë probably owe much to Mary Shelley's concept of nature's "ironic indifference"¹⁹ and Melville's picture of Ahab's pursuit of the white whale, to him to embodiment of evil, echoes the scientist's pursuit of the monster in Frankenstein.²⁰ Mary Shelley's scenery--

¹⁴Nelson, p. 247.

¹⁵Nitchie, p. 147.

¹⁶Spark, p. 136.

¹⁷Bloom, p. 213.

¹⁸Nelson, p. 249; Spark, p. 158.

¹⁹Nelson, p. 253.

²⁰Nelson, p. 256.

the lonely heaths where Mathilda dies, the tragic solitude of the beach where Falkner buries Alithea, the majesty of Mont Blanc and the frozen wasteland of the North Pole of Frankenstein, the dead city of Stamboul, and the picture of a world without people in The Last Man--is reminiscent of the novels of Thomas Hardy, whose characters are set "against some vast backdrop of space and time, which lends them grandeur in the very act of dwarfing them and assimilates these individual sufferings to the general pathos of humanity."²¹

Furthermore, Mary Shelley's novels foreshadow the movement of naturalism in the novel of the late nineteenth-century by creating an "amoral universe where good is not rewarded and evil punished, where indeed good and evil have no meaning."²² Mary Shelley's novels have no villains, only victims, victims of destiny and their own "solipsistic struggle

²¹Joseph Warren Beach, English Literature of the Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries: 1798 to the First World War (New York: Collier's Books, 1962), p. 168.

²²Roland N. Stromberg, ed., Realism, Naturalism, and Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848-1914 (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. xxi.

within themselves."²³ In The Last Man, Mary Shelley reveals that as the "human race diminishes. . . all moral concepts become meaningless: good and evil mean only pleasure and pain, life and death."²⁴ Furthermore, Mary Shelley's systematic approach in relating how the Monster is educated in Frankenstein and her descriptions of the devastation of the plague in The Last Man and its effect on all types of individuals would have satisfied even Emile Zola.

Like Hardy, Mary Shelley envisions nature as neither malevolent nor benevolent, but rather indifferent. For Hardy as for Mary Shelley, "God was equally unconcerned. . . with man's personal life, even with humanity's 'destiny.'"²⁵ Mary Shelley's incomprehensible God reflects Hardy's concept of an indifferent God:

"I have finished another year," said God,
 "In gray, green, white and brown;
 I have strewn the leaf upon the sod,
 Sealed up the worm within the clod,
 And let the last sun down."

"And what's the good of it?" I said,
 "What reasons made you call
 From formless void this earth we tread,
 When nine-and-ninety can be read
 Why nought should be at all?"

²³ Nelson, p. 250.

²⁴ Spark, p. 155.

²⁵ Louis Untermeyer, "Preface," Modern British Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), p. 11.

"Yea Sire; why shaped you us, 'who in
 This tabernacle groan'--
 If ever a joy be found herein,
 Such joy no man had wished to win
 If he had never known!"

Then he: "My labors--logicless--
 You may explain; not I:
 Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
 That I evolved a Consciousness
 To ask for reasons why.

"Strange that ephemeral creatures who
 By my own ordering are,
 Should see the shortness of my view,
 Use ethic tests I never knew,
 Or made provision for!"

He sank to raptness as of yore,
 And opening New Year's Day
 Wove it by rote as theretofore,
 And went on working evermore
 In his unweeting way. 26

In addition, Mary Shelley's concept of man's isolation
 anticipates the pessimism of Matthew Arnold:

Yes: in the sea of life enisled,
 With echoing straits between us thrown
 Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
 We mortal millions live alone.
 The islands feel the enclasp^{ing} flow,
 And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights
 And they are swept by balms of spring,
 And in their glens, on starry nights
 The nightingales divinely sing,
 The lovely notes, from shore to shore,
 Across the sounds and channels pour;

²⁶ Hardy, "New Year's Eve," pp. 27-28.

Oh then a longing like despair
 Is to their farthest caverns sent;
 For surely once, they feel, we were
 Parts of a single continent.
 Now round us spreads the watery plain--
 Oh might our marges meet again!

Who ordered, that their longing's fire
 Should be, as soon as kindled, cooled?
 Who renders vain their deep desire?
 A god, a god their severance ruled;
 And bade betwixt their shores to be
 The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea. 27

Mary Shelley's sense of man's isolation from God and man also anticipates twentieth-century pessimism. She could have written as Thomas Wolfe did:

Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother's face; from the prison of her flesh we have come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth.

Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone? 28

The paradox of Mary Shelley's pessimism, however, is that it was born in the midst of Romanticism. Mary Shelley was associated with some of the greatest and most optimistic exponents of Romanticism. Her father had a powerful influence on all the poets of the period. She was personally acquainted with Coleridge; she admired the works of Wordsworth. Her best

27

Matthew Arnold, "To Marguerite," Complete Works,
Lyric and Elegaic Poems (New York: Macmillan Co., 1923), X,13-15.

28

Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward Angel (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), epigraph.

friends were all writers of the Romantic school--Byron, Trelawney, Hunt, Hogg, and she was married to the ideal Romantic, Percy Shelley--all wildly optimistic and deeply Romantic. Ironically, Mary Shelley's personal life taught her the fallacies of the Romantic tradition, and she quietly rebelled against it in her work. Mary Shelley's novels deserve a place in the history of ideas, and in the development of the novel. Her quiet voice has been too long silent.

Bibliography

WORKS BY MARY SHELLEY

History of a Six Weeks' Tour. London: T. Hookham, Jr., Old Bond St., 1817.

Frankenstein Or, The Modern Prometheus. 3 vols. London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mayer, and Jones, Finsbury Sq., 1818; rpt. New York: Signet Classic, 1965.

Valperga; Or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca. 3 vols. London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, Ave-Maria-Lane, 1823.

The Last Man. 3 vols. London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington St., 1826; rpt. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965.

The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck. 3 vols. London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, New Burlington St., 1830.

Lodore. 3 vols. London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, New Burlington St., 1830.

Falkner. 3 vols. London: Saunders and Otley, Conduit St., 1837.

Lives in "Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain, and Portugal." Lardner, The Cabinet Cyclopaedia, 1835.

Lives in "Eminent Scientific and Literary Men in France." Lardner, The Cabinet Cyclopaedia, 1838.

Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843. 2 vols. London: Edward Moxon, Dover, Street, 1844.

The Choice (a poem), edited by H. B. Forman, 1876.

Tales and Stories by W. M. Shelley, collected and edited by R. Garney, 1891.

Prosperine and Midas (dramas), ed A. Koszul. London: Humphrey Milford, 1922.

Mathilda, ed. Elizabeth Nitchie. Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 1959.

The Letters of Mary W. Shelley, ed F. L. Jones. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1944.

Mary Shelley's Journal, ed. F. L. Jones. Norman: Univ of Oklahoma Press, 1947.

WORKS BY SHELLEY EDITED BY MARY SHELLEY

The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1824²

The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1839²

Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments by Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1840.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Aeschylus. The Prometheus Bound, edited and translated, George Thomson. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1932.

Arnold, Matthew. "To Marguerite." Complete Works, Lyric and Elegaic Poems. Vol. 10. New York: Macmillan Co., 1923.

Beach, Joseph Warren. English Literature of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: 1798 to the First World War. New York: Collier Books, 1962.

Bloom, Harold. "Afterword," Frankenstein Or, The Modern Prometheus. New York: Signet Classic, 1965, pp. 212-223.

Brailsford, H. N. Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle. 2nd ed. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951.

Grabo, Carl. Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation. Chapel Hills: North Carolina Press, 1935.

Grylls, R. Glynn. Mary Shelley: A Biography. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1938.

Luke, Hugh J., Jr. "Introduction," The Last Man. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965.

Marshal, Julian, Mrs. The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. 2 Vols. London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1889.

Mays, Milton A. "Frankenstein, Mary Shelley's Black Theodicy." Southern Humanities Review, 3, No. 2 (Spring, 1969), 146-153.

Nelson, Lowry, Jr. "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel." Yale Review, 52 (1963), 236-257.

Nitchie, Elizabeth. Mary Shelley: Author of Frankenstein. New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1953.

Pollin, Burton R. "Philosophical and Literary Sources of Frankenstein." Comparative Literature, 17, No. 2 (Spring, 1965), 97-108.

Scott, Walter Sidney. Ed. Harriet and Mary: Being the Relations Between Percy Bysshe Shelley, Harriet Shelley, Mary Shelley and Thomas Jefferson Hogg As Shown in Letters Between Them Now Published for the First Time. Great Britain: Golden Cockerel Press, 1944.

Shelley, Percy. The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. New York: Modern Library, nd.

Spark, Muriel. Child of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Haddleigh: Tower Bridge Publications, 1951.

Stromberg, Roland M. Ed. Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism: Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848-1914. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

Wolfe, Thomas. Look Homeward Angel. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.