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Romantic Disillusionment in the Later Works of Mary Shelley

Rebecca Domke

PhD

University of Glasgow

School of Critical Studies

Department of English Literature

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Abstract

Romantic Disillusionment in the Later Works of Mary Shelley argues that, despite a growing consensus among modern critics that Mary Shelley's works, and especially the novels written after Percy Bysshe Shelley's death, are of lesser quality than her earlier novels, especially *Frankenstein*, the later works deserve more attention than they have hitherto received. The title *Romantic Disillusionment*, at once establishes my disagreement with those of Shelley's critics who insist that her work is continuous with her father's, her mother's and her husband's. No doubt, she rehearses various elements that characterise her family's writings, revisits their favourite themes, but she does so in a way that is distinctively her own. The thesis locates in Shelley's work a more general sense of disillusionment with Romantic ideas, amongst them a reverence for the sublime, a confident faith in the power of the imagination, and a belief in human perfectibility, ideas current in her father's writing and discussed in the circles in which he moved, as well as those she joined as Percy Bysshe Shelley's lover and wife. The influence of her parents and husband and other contemporaries is traced with particular attention to the disillusionment that she at first shared with them and later came to feel in them. Shelley often invokes Romantic ideals, but characteristically she invokes them only to ironise or undermine them.

The thesis is organized in six chapters: an introduction is followed by four chapters on the four novels Shelley wrote after her husband's death, and a conclusion. The introduction gives an overview of Shelley's early novels, *Frankenstein* and *Valperga*, as well as the novella *Matilda*, trying to establish how far Shelley even in her early writings did not simply, as seems to be the consensus, follow her family's notions. This is followed by a chapter on *The Last Man*, which discusses the opposition between the public and the private life, between a life devoted to public activity and a life spent in seclusion. This chapter also explores Mary Shelley's understanding of creativity and in particular her interest in biography. Indeed, all Mary Shelley's later novels can be understood as

disguised biographies, substitutes for the book that she had been forbidden to write, the biography of her husband. This chapter also discusses the function of the plague as, like death itself, a leveller, the destroyer not simply of humanity but of all human ideals. I understand the novel in conclusion as a parodic challenge to Godwin's and P. B. Shelley's belief in human perfectibility and the millenarian cast of mind that the two men shared. The following chapter on *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* examines Shelley's single later experiment in the historical novel. Clearly she is responding to the achievement of Walter Scott, as well as to his extraordinary commercial success, but once again hers is an active response. Unlike Scott, she does not pretend to offer a disinterested description of historical events but instead undertakes a passionate engagement with history. She effects, I will argue a self-conscious feminization of the genre of the historical novel. The chapter on *Lodore* focuses on education, especially the question of female education that has preoccupied not only Shelley's mother, but many of the most significant female intellectuals of her mother's generation. In the penultimate chapter, I argue that *Falkner* is an appropriate culmination of Shelley's career as a novelist. It is a novel in which she incorporates disguised the 'Lives' of Godwin and Shelley, as well as a novel in which she attempts a vindication of the reputation of her mother. It is a novel in which she is especially concerned with her relationship with her father, but for her it is a literary as much as a personal relationship. The novel is modelled, I shall argue, on *Hamlet*, the play in which Shakespeare explores most complexly the fraught relationship between the parent and the child, and it can also be understood as a re-writing of her own father's most successful novel, *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*.

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Last but certainly not least I would like to thank my husband, family and friends, who by permanently asking me, when I would finish this thesis, just pushed me enough to finally complete it, despite all adversities. Thank you all!

Author's Declaration

I declare that except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Rebecca Domke

Definitions/ Abbreviations

Since Mary and Percy Shelley share the same last name, for reasons of clarity I am using Mary, Mary Shelley or Shelley to refer to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Percy, Percy Bysshe Shelley or P. B. Shelley to refer to her husband.

1. Introduction

For much of her life Mary Shelley worked surrounded by other writers, philosophers and thinkers. Even when she was very young, her father received frequent visits from the most important authors of the time, Coleridge being perhaps the most eminent example. You could even argue that her parents formed a little coterie in themselves, although not one, of course, that she lived in, since her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died shortly after giving birth, Mary Shelley only knew her through her literary works and William Godwin's memoir, which Mary Shelley read over and over again. After she eloped with Percy Bysshe Shelley, they lived for some time in exile in Switzerland, where together with Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, Lord Byron, and Dr John Polidori they formed the group from which emerged *Frankenstein*, probably one of the most famous novels to come out of a creative network. Godwin in particular, influenced Mary's work practices – he taught her to take notes, construct chronologies and use cross-references – and he also influenced her ideas. His fascination with the impostor Perkin Warbeck, for example, suggested the subject of her fourth novel. Apart from exchanging ideas the pair also co-operated in the more practical aspects of the life of a writer. Godwin edited Mary Shelley's works, suppressing *Matilda*, and correcting the manuscript of *Valperga*. For her part, Mary Shelley used her influence with publishers to negotiate contracts for her father. In one instance she seems even to have accepted a lower fee herself in order to secure a larger advance for her father.¹ The symbiosis with her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, was very similar. He wrote advertisements for her first novel, *Frankenstein*, which he had also revised in manuscript, she made fair copies of his poems, and sometimes, as in the case of *The Cenci*, seems to have been closely involved in the process of composition. After his death his growing fame relied very largely on her skills as an editor. Without her efforts much of Percy's poetry might have been lost and would certainly have been left in a state

¹ Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley. Romance and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 303.

of disarray. Another element of their marriage was the practice of reading books together and their shared study of the Greek language. Despite this intensive interchange, Mary Shelley from the first insisted on her independence from her immediate family, as I will show through discussions of *The Last Man*, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, *Lodore* and *Falkner*.

This thesis focuses on Mary Shelley's later works, those written after her husband's death in 1822. In this chapter, I will establish as a necessary context for the study of the later work the writings of Mary Shelley's father, her mother and her husband, and the two novels that she wrote during her husband's lifetime, *Frankenstein* and the historical novel, *Valperga*. I argue that the ideas and writings of her parents and her husband and his circle constituted a legacy at once enriching and oppressive, and I investigate Shelley's complex relationship with this inheritance. I discuss her experiments with genres already explored by Godwin and P. B. Shelley; I consider her attraction to and her scepticism about their romantic idealism and social ameliorism; and I pay attention throughout to her engagement with her mother's central concern with education and the education of women in particular. I show, too, how the novels characteristically at once invite and evade biographical readings.

All Shelley's novels register discomfort with the genres within which they are written. The historical fictions constitute an attempt to understand the present, even if they do so in terms of the past. The futuristic fantasies, in revealing how idealism may be an irresponsible indulgence with catastrophic effects on ordinary lives and on the wider social and political fabric, engage with Shelley's sense of her own historical juncture. I will argue, however, that it is in her two novels with a contemporary setting, *Lodore* and *Falkner* that Mary Shelley most successfully engages with the political, social and moral ideas that formed the intellectual climate of her life. These two novels, which have sometimes been treated dismissively as mere romantic fictions, are the works in which she shows herself best able to overcome the disillusionment with such notions as ameliorism

and perfectability that she had embraced in her earlier writing, and to re-engage with earlier beliefs in imagination and love as drivers of human progress.

I argue that Shelley's engagement with history is repeatedly expressed through an engagement with her own personal history, by means of embedded autobiographical narratives and allusions, but it drives towards an extra-personal conclusion which maintains a qualified optimism about women's lives and hence a cautious belief in the effectiveness of human endeavour. Thus, she is able finally to lay to rest her own sometimes guilty regrets about what she had taken from her past and what she had repudiated. I conclude that the reconciliations at the end of *Falkner* may seem improbable – they are surely contrived – but the novel's insistence that the darkest deeds in the past may be forgiven and that a future built on that forgiveness is possible and lasting, expresses a deeply held belief that Mary Shelley had been formulating and strengthening throughout her literary career. Given all that Mary Shelley had endured, in fact and in fiction, between her husband's death in 1822 when she was only 25 years old and the conclusion of *Falkner* 15 years later, she seems entitled to her hard-won optimism.

The title of the thesis, 'Romantic Disillusionment', establishes immediately my variance with those of Shelley's critics who insist that her work is continuous with her father's, her mother's and her husband's. I locate in her work, in a more general sense, a disillusionment with notions such as the aesthetic supremacy of the sublime, the power of the imagination, and human perfectibility, ideals current in her father's writings and discussed in the circles in which he moved, as well as those she joined as Percy Bysshe Shelley's lover and wife. I will trace the influences of her parents, of her husband, of Byron and other contemporaries on her writing, paying particular attention to the disillusionment that she at first shared with them and later came to feel in them. I will argue that in the novels Shelley repeatedly invokes Romantic ideals only to ironize or undermine them. In this, I am sharply opposed to the dominant critical understanding of Mary Shelley's achievement, a school best represented by Betty T. Bennett who insists that

Shelley's 'novels reveal new depths when read as an engagement with Shelley's inheritance as the literary heir of her parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.'² This is not to deny that Mary Shelley's fictions are best understood in relation to the writings of other members of her family. Mary herself even in *Frankenstein*, her first novel, seems to argue against the notion that the Romantic writer should be a solitary genius rather than part of a family, coterie or circle of friends. Mary Shelley also claims that '[m]erely copying from our own hearts will no more form a first rate work of art, than will the most exquisite representation of mountains, water, wood, and glorious clouds, form a good painting, if none of the rules of grouping or colouring are followed.'³ This quotation at once disclaims the notion that the writer of genius is enfranchised from following 'rules', and accepts the notion that every writer writes within a tradition, as a follower. Clearly the tradition within which Mary Shelley wrote was in large part constituted by the writings of her family, her mother, father and husband. Mary Shelley herself approaches literature in a biographical manner at times, as can be seen in the extensive notes in which she establishes the biographical contexts of P. B. Shelley's posthumous poems. As one of her recent critics observes, 'Shelley's works are not only autobiographical but also highly allusive, drawing particularly on the works of the authors in her own family and circle.'⁴ The key words here are 'drawing on' which does not necessarily imply agreement. Jane Blumberg's interesting study *Mary Shelley's Early Novels* quite convincingly argues that Shelley from the beginning aims to be an 'independent artist of complexity and depth' and that there can be established as early as

² Julia Saunders, 'Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', in *Mary Shelley's Fictions: From *Frankenstein* to *Falkner**. Ed. Michael Eberle Sinatra (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 211-223.

³ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, 'Review of William Godwin's *Cloudesley*', *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* 27 (May 1830), 172.

⁴ James P. Carson, "'A Sigh of Many Hearts': History, Humanity, and Popular Culture in *Valperga*", in *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley After *Frankenstein*: Essays in Honor of the Bicentenary of Mary Shelley's Birth* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1997), 173.

Frankenstein an ‘intellectual break Mary made with Percy Shelley’s radical ideas.’⁵ She does, however argue that although ‘none of [her later novels] share the complexity, scope and ambition of the first three, they nonetheless feature certain themes and issues raised earlier in *Frankenstein*, *Valperga* and *The Last Man*.’⁶ I will here try to show that even Shelley’s later novels are quite complex in their own right and that they do indeed continue the trend that Blumberg has discovered in the earlier novels.

My argument will not draw exclusively on Mary Shelley’s novels but also her travel writings, poems, letters, journals and short stories as well as the brief lives she contributed to *Larder’s Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. Each of the chapters will focus on a single novel, the novels being treated in chronological order, but the other writings will be considered as and when it seems most appropriate.

1.1. *Frankenstein*

Frankenstein is still by far the most widely discussed of Shelley’s novels. It is a novel about a lonely genius, Victor Frankenstein, who tries to create life out of dead matter. To achieve his ambitious goal he retreats from society almost entirely. He becomes a solitary who spends his time in churchyards, bone houses and his laboratory, where he thinks and works alone. He clearly embraces ‘the Godwinian idea of the noble pursuit of knowledge too eagerly and too uncritically’.⁷ Victor succeeds in bringing his constructed being to life. But he does not, as he expected, create a beautiful new race. Instead, his creation is ugly with dull yellow eyes. Famously, Frankenstein flees his creation, setting in motion the pattern of flight and pursuit that ends with the monster’s murder of Elizabeth and Frankenstein’s own death as well as the creature’s supposed own immolation: ‘Instead of bringing humanity into a new age, Victor, like the disappointing Napoleon, plunges it

⁵ Jane Blumberg, *Mary Shelley’s Early Novels: ‘this child of imagination and misery’* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), viii.

⁶ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley’s Early Novels*, 216.

⁷ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley’s Early Novels*, 36.

back into darkness.’⁸ A standard reading of Mary Shelley’s novel suggests that the author in creating the character of Victor Frankenstein represents as destructive the notion that Romantic creativity is the activity of the solitary genius. It follows that she inclines to a notion of healthy creativity as social and outgoing according to the pattern associated with Leigh Hunt and the Cockney School.

My concern is not to add here to the huge volume of criticism that *Frankenstein* has generated, but rather to indicate that criticism of *Frankenstein* has established the terms in which all of Shelley’s later fiction is understood. *Frankenstein* has often prompted biographical readings, both on a macro level in which Walton and Frankenstein are understood as Romantic over-reachers who should be understood as akin to William Godwin and P. B. Shelley, and on the micro level, on which, for example, Joseph Lew claims of the account of Safie’s mother, that ‘we have encoded here an account of Shelley’s relationship to Wollstonecraft’.⁹ *Frankenstein* has often been broadly read as a criticism of the Romantic concept of the solitary genius. Victor Frankenstein in this reading exemplifies the solitary genius whose studies are represented as excluding him from all domestic relationships, an exclusion literalised when Victor removes from his home and family to study in Germany. The same removal secures his estrangement from his fiancée, Elizabeth. His ambition to create new life is realised, but it does not compromise his solitude because the creature is abandoned by Frankenstein as soon as it comes to life. As Schiefelbein puts it:

Poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose verse acted as ‘a clarion call to revolutionary political action’, celebrated the creative process and ignored ‘the creative product’. According to Mellor, Shelley critiques such irresponsibility in her character Victor Frankenstein, who forgets the product of his creation. Shelley believed that at the root of this irresponsibility was an inflated sense of self.¹⁰

⁸ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley’s Early Novels*, 52.

⁹ Joseph W. Lew, ‘God’s Sister: History and Ideology in *Valperga*’, in *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 170.

¹⁰ Michael Schiefelbein, “‘The Lessons of True Religion’: Mary Shelley’s Tribute to Catholicism in *Valperga*”, *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 30 No. 2 Summer 1998), 67.

Despite Shelley's Lockean representation of the monster as a *tabula rasa*, an empty page to be filled by experience, there is also a Rousseauvian claim that the creature is naturally good, and his nature is perverted only because his benevolence prompts violent hostility from all those with whom he makes contact. He is defined not by his nature but by his appearance. Thus the solitary genius, Victor Frankenstein, does not only play God by taking it upon himself to create life, his action results in the destruction of his own family, his friend and his bride. The relationship between ambition and a duty towards others, between the conflicting claims of the self and of society, and the fraught relationship between the public and the private sphere are themes, already apparent in *Frankenstein*, that continue to occupy Shelley throughout her career, and are still evident in her last novel, *Falkner*, in which I will argue they culminate.

Frankenstein also anticipates all the later novels by raising perplexing questions of genre. What is *Frankenstein*? Is it a gothic novel? It certainly contains some Gothic elements, bleakly sublime settings, solitary Gothic villains, the supernatural, even if the supernatural is a product of scientific endeavour rather than of ghostly visitation. Or is it better understood as a Jacobin novel of the 1790s, a novel like her father's *Caleb Williams* or her mother's *The Wrongs of Woman* written long after its time? Or, is it best understood as the first science fiction novel? Generic instability might itself be seen as an aspect of Shelley's literary inheritance, because her father's novels, not just *Caleb Williams* but *St Leon* and its successors, are also at once Jacobin novels of ideas and Gothic fictions, and the same might be said of *The Wrongs of Woman*. Mary Shelley continues to play with the possibilities of genre throughout her career, as will be established in the later chapters of this thesis.

Frankenstein is also the first novel to prompt the discussion between those like Betty Bennett, who see Mary Shelley as maintaining the radical tradition of her parents and husband, and those like Lee Sterrenburg, who find in *Frankenstein* a critique of that

tradition. It is a question which continues to reverberate in discussions of Mary's later works. Blumberg claims that

[i]n fact, *Frankenstein* is the starting point for the development of her reactive philosophy, one that violently opposes her husband's optimism and mocks its apparent simplicity to a degree that suggests intellectual antagonism as one reason behind the couple's much-discussed disharmony immediately before the poet's death. *Frankenstein*, which, as I will show, satirizes and rejects Godwinian and Shelleyan perfectibility, is anything but "her homage to her father", as Locke would have it.¹¹

I will trace in this thesis a pattern of development in which Shelley, as she grows older, and as the figures, who influenced her in her youth, become chronologically more distant, moves towards a more critical view of many of the radical and romantic ideas she seemed to promote in her youth.

1.2. *Valperga*

Valperga, Shelley's first historical novel, is characteristic in the evidence it offers of painstaking research. Not only does she quote from several histories in which Castruccio appears,¹² Shelley has also studied the customs of fourteenth-century Italy and even its fashions.¹³ As in her later historical novel, *The Adventures of Perkin Warbeck*, Shelley does, however, invent the two principal female characters, Euthanasia and Beatrice, as if to register the manner in which the historical tradition has minimised or occluded the role of women. In *Valperga*, Mary Shelley pauses more than once to comment on the Italian tradition of impromptu poetry and drama.¹⁴ Both of the Shelleys and Lord Byron seem to

¹¹ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels*, 5.

¹² Namely Machiavelli's *La Vita di Castruccio Castracani da Lucca* and Sismondi's *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes de l'Age Moyen*.

¹³ Notebook including preparation for *Valperga* formerly Dep.e.274 now MS Abinger e.49. Here Shelley makes extensive notes on customs, food and fashion of 14th century Italy, and the original inscription of Castruccio's grave can also be found.

¹⁴ See Angela Notebook including preparation for *Valperga* formerly Dep.e.274 now MS Abinger e.49. Here Shelley makes extensive notes on customs, food and fashion of 14th century Italy, and the original inscription of Castruccio's grave can also be found. Esterhammer,

have been fascinated by the Italian *improvvisatore* and particularly with Tommaso Sgricci the most famous contemporary example of the kind. It may be that Mary Shelley was helped by her experience of Italian improvisatory art to recognise that the novel might itself achieve some of the qualities of improvisation; that it might rest content with the provisional, and welcome the unplanned and the unsystematic. It may be that the tradition of improvisation helped Mary Shelley to identify aspects of the novel and of novelistic practice that might be thought of as characteristically feminine. *Valperga* is certainly, in comparison with *Frankenstein* a gynocentric novel. Lisa Hopkins reads it as an exploration of motherhood in which Mary Shelley once again reworks her relationship with the mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, whom she never knew, except through her writings and those of others, as well as her own experience of motherhood.¹⁵ Others find in the novel a defence by Mary Shelley of the Catholic faith and of faith in general.¹⁶ Schiefelbein claims that ‘Shelley portrays Euthanasia as a model Catholic’¹⁷ and that ‘Euthanasia’s identification with the Blessed Virgin is striking, particularly in light of her role as teacher of the faith and her own devotion to the Virgin’,¹⁸ and adds, ‘Despite the influence of freethinkers in her life and of her husband, an avowed atheist, Mary Shelley stubbornly clung to a belief in God throughout her life.’¹⁹ Even before the death of her husband, then, Shelley has been recognised as willing to challenge one of his more fervently held beliefs. Daniel E. White classifies the novel very generally as a ‘drama of love and ambition with contemporary dynamics of gender and power’,²⁰ while William Brewer offers a

‘Improvisational Aesthetics: Byron, the Shelley Circle and Tommaso Sgricci’, *Romanticism on the Net*, No 43, August 2006. <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2006/v/n43/013592ar.html>.

¹⁵ See Lisa Hopkins, ‘Death and the Castrated: The Complex Psyches of *Valperga*’, *Romanticism on the Net*, No 40, November 2005. <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2005/v/n40/012460ar.html>.

¹⁶ See Michael Schiefelbein, “The Lessons of True Religion”, 59-79.

¹⁷ Michael Schiefelbein, “The Lessons of True Religion”, 63.

¹⁸ Michael Schiefelbein, “The Lessons of True Religion”, 63/64.

¹⁹ Michael Schiefelbein, “The Lessons of True Religion”, 69.

²⁰ Daniel E. White, “The god undeified”: Mary Shelley’s *Valperga*, Italy, and the Aesthetic of Desire’, *Romanticism on the Net*, No. 6, May 1997. <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1997/n6/005750ar.html>. paragraph 13.

psychological reading: for him, it is a novel in which ‘Shelley suggests that in the case of extreme trauma writing is sometimes more viable than speaking as a form of language therapy.’²¹ I will argue in the chapters that follow that the manner in which Shelley’s novels have prompted both historicist and psychoanalytical readings is, whatever one may think of the readings themselves, a proper register of Shelley’s refusal to distinguish between the personal and the political, a refusal that has its earliest clear expression in *Valperga*.

Valperga, like *Frankenstein*, is a novel that seems actively to challenge generic boundaries. Mary Shelley’s second novel is clearly identified as a historical novel, but it is a historical novel that always keeps in the reader’s mind the contemporary moment. Shelley offers fourteenth-century Italy as a dark mirror in which nineteenth-century England is invited to recognise its own face, and again in this she anticipates her later practice. In the later novel *Perkin Warbeck*, ‘Shelley imagines history not as a given linear sequence but as competing narrative possibilities that exceed a single historical trajectory.’²² In this, Machiavelli, one of her principal sources, is a model. Both writers show themselves prepared to ‘alter and manipulate the facts surrounding their central figure, producing one story of a lauded hero whose *virtù* is defeated by *fortuna* while the other laments the bloody trail of a cruel tyrant.’²³ As Betty Bennett observes, the novel begins with the political: ‘As politically motivated as Machiavelli’s *Castruccio*, Mary Shelley’s *Valperga* opens with a description of the “fury of civil wars” between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines that has “almost destroyed” Lombardy and Tuscany.’²⁴ Only after establishing this firm historical frame, does she begin to explore the relationship central to the novel between Castruccio and Euthanasia, in which the distinction between

²¹ William D. Brewer, ‘Mary Shelley on the Therapeutic Value of Language’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 30 No.4, Fall 1994, 387-407. Online edition, paragraph 1.

²² Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley’, *ELH*, Vol. 75 No 3, Fall 2008, 625-652. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/elh/v075/75.3.kelly.html>. Paragraph 7.

²³ Betty T. Bennett, ‘Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s *Castruccio*: Biography as Metaphor’, *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism*, Vol. 3 No. 2, 139.

²⁴ Betty T. Bennett, ‘Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s *Castruccio*’, 142.

the political and the personal lapses. Even in her Short Stories, Shelley, if necessary, as in ‘The Evil Eye’ provides a thoroughly researched historical background. In respect to *Valperga*, James Carson draws the conventional conclusion: ‘[t]o the degree that Mary Shelley’s first two novels are didactic works, they promote the same moral about the superiority of domestic affections “in blameless obscurity” to the ambition for glory and fame.’²⁵ But *Valperga* is more searching than this because Euthanasia, who embodies more powerfully than any other character the value of domestic affections, finds that she must establish and defend a state in order to safeguard those values. Moreover, she finds that she can do so only if she is willing to adopt those masculine values against which she protests, with the result that her defeat is painfully paradoxical, at once a register of her helplessness in the face of Castruccio’s warrior ethic and a triumphant indication of her refusal to surrender the values in which she believes, even if that refusal brings with it not only her own defeat but the defeat of her followers. It is an issue that will continue to occupy Shelley in all her later novels but most evidently in *The Last Man* and *Perkin Warbeck*. *Valperga* is a political novel, but, as Carson argues, it can also be read as a

historical novel of sensibility- that is to say, a novel in which a temporal succession of feelings takes priority over a chronology of public events- in order to explore political ideals for the self-government and policing of socially and culturally conditioned human agents. Her ideals derive from classical republican thought, from the historical and economic views of J.C.L. de Sismondi and from the rationalism and sentimentalism of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin.²⁶

So it is a novel in which the personal takes priority over the political, but only in order the better to explore politics. The range of models with which Carson credits her is bewilderingly heterogeneous but that, I would want to suggest, is precisely the point. For

²⁵ James P. Carson, “A Sigh of Many Hearts”: History, Humanity, and Popular Culture in *Valperga*, in *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley After Frankenstein: Essays in Honor of the Bicentenary of Mary Shelley’s Birth* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1997), 167.

²⁶ James P. Carson, “A Sigh of Many Hearts”, 168.

Carson, ‘she places sentiments above political events in her representation of the past’.²⁷ In this, she clearly follows Godwin who in his essay ‘Of History and Romance’ ‘begins by indicating a preference for individual history (i.e., biography) over general history’.²⁸ But it might be better to accept that for Mary Shelley the novel is pre-eminently the genre that disrupts such hierarchies. As Carson argues, ‘[a] historical novel of sensibility like *Valperga* turns from public events, which are the objects of interested and partisan misrepresentations, to the supposedly less contested representations of the subjective and emotional responses of historical personages.’²⁹ But it turns from the political to the personal, as exemplified by the two principal female characters, Euthanasia and Beatrice, only to find that the political reappears in a different guise.

It is also through the two women characters that the novel engages the theme of education, another key interest of Shelley’s that persists throughout her career. Shelley clearly agrees with her father that education is the principal condition of a good society. Thus, in all her novels, beginning with *Frankenstein*, she introduces all her main and even some of her minor characters by informing the reader about her characters’ various types of education. Euthanasia has been taught the classical languages by her blind father. In this she resembles *Lodore*’s Fanny Derham. Daniel White offers the best summary of the kind of education that is credited to her:

The formation of her character is first a page from the education tenets of rationality for young women of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which Shelley found cause to reread in May of 1820 one month after beginning to write *Valperga*. Furthermore her education embodies feminine ideals of sensibility, not just those of Rousseau – Shelley re-read *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) for the second time in February of 1820, having previously read it in 1815 and 1817 – but ideals from both the context, and often troubling subtexts, of the long tradition of educated female poets, novelists and dramatists of sensibility extending back to Charlotte Smith and Hannah Cowley in the 1780s.

²⁷ James P. Carson, “A Sigh of Many Hearts”, 168.

²⁸ James P. Carson, “A Sigh of Many Hearts”, 172.

²⁹ James P. Carson, “A Sigh of Many Hearts”, 171.

Euthanasia becomes the ideal “Romantic” woman conceived from the bourgeois feminist perspective of the 1790s, a self-sufficient woman who can both feel and think, and whose feelings and thoughts lead her to an ideology of social renovation through universal love and gradual political reform through organic change.³⁰

Like her mother, and the whole generation of women writers contemporary with her, she promotes an alternative ideology which ‘celebrated the education of the rational woman and an ethic of care that required one to take full responsibility for the predictable consequences of one’s thoughts and actions, for all the children of one’s mind and body’.³¹ This is well said, though Schiefelbein does not recognize the full paradox of the situation in which Euthanasia finds herself, in which she can protect her ‘children’ only if she is prepared to adopt the tactics of Castruccio, when he threatens them. As Kari Lokke adds, ‘Euthanasia [is also] created as a critical response to [Stael’s] *Corinne*, whose heroine Shelley found lacking in moral courage.’³² Unlike *Corinne*, Euthanasia will not give up her principles for love. But from my point of view it is most important to note that Euthanasia is the first of the long sequence of Shelley’s fictional characters who is put to this test, a sequence that culminates in Rupert Falkner in her last novel.

Beatrice on the other hand has been given an exclusively religious education. She believes herself to be a vessel of God, an *ancilla dei*. Her life is ruled by a vivid imagination:

Poor Beatrice! She had inherited from her mother the most ardent imagination that ever animated a human soul. Its images were as vivid as reality, and were so overpowering, that they appeared to her, when she compared them to the calm sensations of others, as something superhuman, and she followed that as a guide, which she ought to have bound with fetters, and to have curbed and crushed by every effort of reason. (*Valperga* , 230)

³⁰ Daniel E. White, ‘The god undeified’, paragraph 17.

³¹ Michael Schiefelbein, “The Lessons of True Religion”, 68.

³² Kari Lokke, , “Children of Liberty”: Idealist Historiography in Stael, Shelley, and Sand’, *PMLA* Vol. 118 No. 3, 512

According to Blumberg, this makes Beatrice ‘the potential end result of the unrestrained and impractical Romantic imagination’.³³ And clearly Shelley here comments on this sort of imagination in quite a negative way. As White observes it is easy to understand Beatrice as a figure through whom Shelley satirises the Romantic cult of the inspired bard: ‘Beatrice is an unflattering portrait of the Romantic poet of imagination whose flashing eyes and floating hair persuade her, or rather him, that he alone among all humanity has drunk the milk of paradise.’³⁴ But however deluded she may be, Beatrice is also strong of will and remains true to her own values. She is resolutely blind to Castruccio’s negative character traits. She creates in him an alternative God, whom she worships till the end. In this, she can be contrasted with the earlier Matilda and the later Ellen-Clarice of the short story ‘The Mourner’: ‘In telling Euthanasia of her terrible experiences, she proves far more willing than either Matilda or Ellen-Clarice to speak of what troubles her, but there are obvious limits to what even she is able to articulate.’³⁵ Beatrice, by contrast, is not afraid to use and make heard her own voice.

Valperga’s politics are from the first gendered. Shelley has Euthanasia say:

When I first inherited my mother’s power, I gave much consideration to this very question, not of forming a separate republic of my poor villages, but of incorporating them, as many nobles have done, and as doubtless the lords of Valperga will one day be obliged to do, with some neighbouring and more powerful republic.’ (*Valperga*, 169)

Clearly, she understands the political relations between Italy’s many states in terms of marriage. Just as a woman seeks the support of a husband, so, she imagines a union with some more powerful neighbouring republic. Betty Bennett suggests that ‘Euthanasia’s

³³ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley’s Early Novels*, 100.

³⁴ Daniel E. White, ‘The god undeified’, paragraph 21.

³⁵ William D. Brewer, ‘Mary Shelley on the Therapeutic Value of Language’, paragraph 22.

dreams for Italy echo Machiavelli's own objective of widespread political harmony, but they would be realized through "glorious action" rather than ruthless power.³⁶ It might be more pertinent to remark that, as Euthanasia discovers, a harmoniously egalitarian relationship between states is as difficult to secure as a harmoniously egalitarian marriage. Her republican ideals are what keep her from marrying her beloved Castruccio. Betty Bennett objects: '[I]n focusing her version of the Castruccio story on the fictional relationship between Castruccio and Euthanasia, Mary Shelley interpolates a political theory as foreign to fourteenth-century as it was to nineteenth-century civilization.'³⁷ But it is precisely Shelley's point to suggest an analogy between Euthanasia's desire to preserve the autonomy of the state over which she rules, and her desire to preserve her own autonomy as a woman. Both ambitions would be threatened by a marriage to Castruccio. When Castruccio successfully claims lordship over Florence as well as Lucca, he may seem a fourteenth-century version of Napoleon, who is understood by Shelley as by her husband, as the corrupter rather than as the culmination of the French Revolution, but he is also the potential husband who finds it as difficult in the nineteenth as in the fourteenth century to understand marriage in any other way than as the submission of the wife to her male superior. Mary Shelley must surely have identified Napoleonic tendencies as apparent in the house as much as in the political arena, and she may have detected such tendencies, too, in the men closest to her, in Byron, her father and her husband.³⁸

Euthanasia's republican values were shared by enlightenment thinkers and Romantic poets like Godwin and Percy Shelley. Their beliefs in perfectibility and human meliorism made them optimistic that a world made up of equal, autonomous individuals ever progressing closer towards the infinitely deferred goal of universal happiness might be ushered into existence. Euthanasia herself, on the other hand, finds that the world is racked

³⁶ Betty T. Bennett, 'Machiavelli's and Mary Shelley's Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor', 143.

³⁷ Betty T. Bennett, 'Machiavelli's and Mary Shelley's Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor', 143.

³⁸ See: Theresa M. Kelly, 'Romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley', paragraph 55.

by unresolvable contradictions. She is persuaded that she must give up her hopes of private happiness in order disinterestedly to pursue a wider public happiness for a republican Italy. She nurtures in herself hopes ‘built on optimism about the great enlightenment project of perfectibility.’³⁹ But that optimism cannot survive the impact of events, an impact that is felt at once and indistinguishably on Euthanasia’s private and public ambitions. ‘There is no hint in the world of *Valperga* that humanity has the potential to improve itself or significantly better its lot’ and thus the novel is an early example of Shelley directly contradicting the ideas and ideals of her husband and father.⁴⁰

William Brewer has argued that ‘Mary Shelley’s fictions return repeatedly to the predicament of a suffering human being torn between the impulse to communicate and the urge to retreat into isolation and death. More often than not, the result is psychic paralysis, the opposite of the meliorism championed by Percy Shelley.’⁴¹ I would want to add that it is a political as much as a psychic paralysis, which is also manifested in the failure of political language that resulted in the reestablishment of autocratic rule over most of Europe in the immediate aftermath of Napoleon’s defeat, a failure to generate a language in which individuals might articulate a relationship one with another in terms other than power and ownership. It is true that Shelley returns to the ideas of meliorism and perfectibility throughout her novelistic career. Kari Lokke concludes that ‘Beatrice and Euthanasia [are themselves] symbols of nihilism and utopianism, melancholy and enthusiasm, destructive passion and perfectibility respectively.’⁴² Similar oppositions are enacted in all four of the later novels.

Betty Bennett understands *Valperga* as restating the idealistic politics that Shelley shared with her father and husband. Theresa Kelly by contrast argues that ‘*Valperga* is in many ways a stinging inversion of the idealist triumphs offered in Percy Shelley’s

³⁹ Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley’, paragraph 25.

⁴⁰ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley’s Early Novels*, 76.

⁴¹ William D. Brewer, ‘Mary Shelley on the Therapeutic Value of Language’, paragraph 30.

⁴² Kari Lokke, ‘Children of Liberty’, 511.

Prometheus Unbound, Mary Shelley's critique foregrounds the negativity that haunts both Shelleys' meditations on the incommensurable relation, in different times and places, between idealism and political reality.⁴³ My interest, and the interest that I will pursue throughout this thesis, is in Shelley's practice of producing fictions that might plausibly prompt both of these conflicting responses. *Valperga* takes as its central figure a typical Renaissance or Romantic over-reacher. Castruccio aspires to be an Alexander. He points in all four directions of the compass, blasphemously extending his ambition by pointing also at the heavens, and exclaims, 'There – there – there, and there, shall my fame reach!' (*Valperga*, 76). This is the character that is opposed to the virtuous republican Euthanasia. In the end Castruccio, as is historically correct, wins the day and all Euthanasia's efforts to prevent him prove futile. Michael Schiefelbein explicates the moral that he finds inscribed in the novel:

Shelley [thus] intends *Valperga* as a critique of the traditional understanding of success and heroism. Like some of her Romantic contemporaries disillusioned by Napoleon's exploits, she rejected the Machiavellianism embodied in him and tyrants before him, like the Caesars and Alexander the Great.⁴⁴

But it seems reductive to understand the novel simply as offering a warning against tyranny. Again, we have here a strong disappointment in the outcome of the French revolution. Daniel White comes closer to my own view when he offers 'a reading of *Valperga* as a critique of what Mary Shelley understood to be the implicit correlation between the aesthetic of desire central to her perception of masculine Romanticism and the political and social implications of gendered identity during the period'.⁴⁵ Male Romantics are intoxicated with ideas of ambition and power (see 'Prometheus Unbound' for just one example) in a manner that unites them rather than distinguishes them from the individuals

⁴³ Theresa M. Kelly, 'Romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley', paragraph 39.

⁴⁴ Michael Schiefelbein, 'The Lessons of True Religion', 73.

⁴⁵ Daniel E. White, "'The god undeified'", paragraph 1.

and the institutions that they oppose. P. B. Shelley's Prometheus spends the entire drama intent on securing his difference from Jupiter, and succeeds so little that Shelley can imagine a new world coming into being only after he has secured the removal of Prometheus just as much as of Jupiter. White seems right to argue that '[*Valperga*] is less about Castruccio than the destructive effects of this ambitious and striving masculine paradigm of egotism [...] on the social spheres around him,'⁴⁶ and more particularly on the women who love him. Although Euthanasia would willingly give up her life to change him and Beatrice would willingly give up her life to please him, in each case it is a willingness that serves to underwrite rather than oppose Castruccio's values. His love for the women always remains secondary to his political ambitions. As White argues, '*Valperga*, then, should be understood as participating in both the English feminine Romantic criticism of masculine Romanticism's blindness to its own intoxication with sublime images of desire and power – its aesthetic of desire – and in the Italian Romantic response to the dynamics of imperialist domination.'⁴⁷ But White fails to acknowledge that in their willingness to die for him, the two women assist rather than counteract his intoxication. For White *Valperga* is an instance of 'counter-Romanticism,' but he fails to acknowledge the tendency for counter-revolutions to prop up the regimes that they seek to undermine.⁴⁸ Betty Bennett takes a diametrically opposite position. For her it is a novel in which Shelley joins ranks with her father and husband: 'Though she abhorred war, Mary Shelley understood and echoed Machiavelli's call to arms in the name of freedom, inspired by the struggles taking place in Spain, Naples, and Greece. Both Shelleys celebrated these "just" wars: he with the "Ode to Naples" and *Hellas*; she in her public and private letters and, unquestionably, in *Valperga*.'⁴⁹ But Mary Shelley had travelled through war-torn Europe in 1816, and the impact of that journey stayed with her throughout her life. The question for her was not so

⁴⁶ Daniel E. White, "The god undeified", paragraph 2.

⁴⁷ Daniel E. White, "The god undeified", paragraph 5.

⁴⁸ Daniel E. White, "The god undeified", paragraph 3.

⁴⁹ Betty T. Bennett, 'Machiavelli's and Mary Shelley's Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor', 147.

much whether or not a war was just, as whether even a just war could justify the suffering of its innocent victims. Betty Bennett herself quotes from Shelley's *Rambles*: 'Cannot it be that peaceful meditation and a strong universal sense of justice may interpose instead of the cannon and the bayonet?' (*Rambles*, 69).⁵⁰ It is a question that seems to invite the answer that it dreads, but it is a question that continues to resonate through Mary Shelley's later novels, perhaps most powerfully in *Perkin Warbeck*. It may be, as James Carson proposes, that Shelley 'is an exponent of what Anne Mellor terms "female Romantic ideology," which stresses Enlightenment values, rationality, domesticity, and selfless sympathy for others,' but if so she is remarkable for the sharpness with which she recognizes the practical flimsiness of the ideology that she expounds.⁵¹

According to Theresa Kelly, 'Euthanasia negatively marks a vision of Italian society in which ideals and republican values might rule the day and the body politic.'⁵² Kelly focuses her attention on the vision, but to me it is just as important to accentuate the negativity. Carson finds in *Valperga* a novel centred on 'the opposition between tyranny and republicanism'⁵³ in which 'Euthanasia heroically and disinterestedly sacrifices her personal love for Castruccio to her devotion to the principle of liberty.'⁵⁴ He is rather less ready to acknowledge that the novel accepts that Euthanasia's sacrifice is not simply personal (she also, until she repents of it, sacrifices the lives of her adherents) and achieves, as Mary Shelley notes in the novel's sad conclusion, nothing whatsoever. Rather he reads the novel's pessimism as registering her agreement with the view of her husband, the view (as Carson rather less persuasively claims Percy Shelley also held), that only gradual reform will prove effective.⁵⁵ For Daniel White *Valperga* acknowledges that the world is not yet ready for the kind of change that Mary Shelley looked forward to, and yet

⁵⁰ Betty T. Bennett, 'Machiavelli's and Mary Shelley's Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor', 148.

⁵¹ James P. Carson, "A Sigh of Many Hearts", 168.

⁵² Theresa M. Kelly, 'Romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley', paragraph 36.

⁵³ James P. Carson, "A Sigh of Many Hearts", 167.

⁵⁴ James P. Carson, "A Sigh of Many Hearts", 175.

⁵⁵ James P. Carson, "A Sigh of Many Hearts", 178.

he continues to maintain that the novel reveals ‘Mary Shelley’s commitment to liberal social reforms and, specifically, to the view formulated by Percy Shelley that the opposition between the forces of liberty and despotism [...] motivates and structures historical progress.’⁵⁶ For White, ‘*Valperga* is determined to deflate the representation of “Italy” as a paradise in the Northern European imagination,’⁵⁷ a representation that Shelley would certainly have detected in some of her husband’s poems, and it may be in some of Byron’s poems, too. But this may be to insist far too confidently that the political vision explored in *Valperga* has exclusive reference to the country in which the novel is set. Betty Bennett’s conclusion seems, in comparison to White’s, sunnily optimistic: for her it is a novel in which ‘Mary Shelley introduced her English Romantic vision of a world in which love might ultimately defeat power, finally suggesting that a republican infrastructure based on love lay outside the world as it then existed, but not outside the human imagination.’⁵⁸ But the substitution of a belief that a world based on love might be realised, for a belief that such a world can only ever be imagined, is surely a rather more substantial revision than Betty Bennett acknowledges. The world is not ready for a republic yet. For White, the novel ‘depicts the gradual disenchantment of a female mind with the illusions imposed on it by a masculine world.’⁵⁹ But that conclusion, too, seems too hopeful because *Valperga* offers no workable alternative to the illusions that it exposes. It is quite true, as Kari Lokke observes, that ‘Shelley’s Castruccio provides an incisive portrait of the seductive appeal and destructive potential of the Napoleonic-Byronic character type’,⁶⁰ but that is the only character type to which the novel allows historical agency.

⁵⁶ James P. Carson, “A Sigh of Many Hearts”, 168.

⁵⁷ Daniel E. White, ‘Mary Shelley’s *Valperga*’, 76.

⁵⁸ Betty T. Bennett, ‘Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor’, 149.

⁵⁹ Daniel E. White, ‘Mary Shelley’s *Valperga*’, 87.

⁶⁰ Kari Lokke, “Children of Liberty”, 511.

Daniel White describes *Valperga* as ‘one of the most relentlessly pessimistic texts of the Romantic period,’⁶¹ focused as it is on the fates of Euthanasia and Beatrice, ‘two fictional characters whose eventual demise tells much in little about her bitter understanding of women in history.’⁶² But Shelley’s pessimism seems to extend beyond the fate of women to challenge the progressive, Whiggish notion of the progress of history that her parents and her husband shared. In *Valperga* it is as if ‘time keeps presenting the same old story in which might rolls over the ideals of a republican state.’⁶³ By the end of the novel Beatrice is long dead in spite of Euthanasia’s selfless struggles to save her, and Euthanasia herself has died in a shipwreck that does not simply take her life but erase all memory of her:

She was never heard of more; even her name perished. She slept in the oozy cavern of the ocean; the seaweed was tangled in her shining hair; and the spirits of the deep wondered that the earth had trusted so lovely a creature to the barren bosom of the sea, which, as an evil step-mother, deceives and betrays all committed to her care. Earth felt no change when she died; and men forgot her. (*Valperga*, 437/38)

So Euthanasia along with all her ideals dies. By the end of the novel political hope seems to have been eradicated as completely as personal hope: Castruccio has even conquered Florence. Thus, with one fell swoop, Shelley negates all the positive ideals that have been introduced throughout the novel. Unlike Demogorgon in the final chorus of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley seems not even to permit her reader the final resource of hope: ‘if Euthanasia embodies the romantic hope for an emancipatory political culture in which an inner self might live and prosper, the novel refuses to protect or ratify this hope either in the historical moment in which it is set or in the romantic future.’⁶⁴ White suggests that the novel’s pessimism is a historical given: ‘the idealistic Euthanasia is doomed from the

⁶¹ Daniel E. White, “The god undeified”, paragraph 1.

⁶² Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley’, paragraph 29.

⁶³ Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality’, paragraph 31.

⁶⁴ Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality’, paragraph 56.

beginning since Shelley remains faithful to the facts of history about the ruthless Castruccio',⁶⁵ but even he admits that it is a pessimism that overflows the fourteenth century to express the despair that a radical such as Mary Shelley must have felt as she witnessed the apparent destruction after Waterloo of all radical hopes not just in Britain but throughout Europe, and nowhere more completely than in the Italy in which she and her husband had chosen to live: '*Valperga* in particular, offers a vigorous and often grim critique of her period's failure to resolve fundamental contradictions along lines of gender and international politics,'⁶⁶ and 'it is in this representation of failed potential that Euthanasia embodies a critique of the existing order.'⁶⁷ In the end

with the death of all female heroines [...] the stage of the novel's history is left empty but for public actions and events, themselves the hollow expressions of egotistical desire. For history to be full, *Valperga* implies, political and social conditions must be such that the private sphere can colonize the public without being fragmented and negated by a world that refuses to forgo its longings and ambitions for aesthetic, social, or political thrones in the "arched palace of eternal fame".⁶⁸

Castruccio survives Euthanasia only for a few years. Some critics have even suggested that his death might be understood as brought about by Euthanasia's posthumous agency: 'Euthanasia nevertheless does not really die, becoming, as Rajan asserts, "a phantasm in the political unconscious who sleeps in the oozy cave of the ocean"'.⁶⁹ But the text simply does not justify such a reading. It clearly states that Euthanasia is forgotten while Castruccio will be remembered for centuries by the epithet inscribed on his grave. As Kelly suggests, 'the critical desire to revive Euthanasia, to effect an apotheosis which the text of the novel specifically refuses, discloses . . . the romantic hope that clings to the fate

⁶⁵ Michael Schiefelbein, "The Lessons of True Religion", 73.

⁶⁶ Daniel E. White, "The god undeified", paragraph 6

⁶⁷ Daniel E. White, "The god undeified", paragraph 18.

⁶⁸ Daniel E. White, "The god undeified", paragraph 20.

⁶⁹ Rajan quoted in Kari Lokke, "Children of Liberty", 513.

of this “feudal countess”⁷⁰. Shelley herself ‘is more sceptical, even negative about saving Euthanasia and what she represents.’⁷¹ Carson persists in drawing a comfortable moral from the novel: ‘Shelley explicitly contrasts Euthanasia and Castruccio in order to show that the sentimental woman succeeds, whereas the ambitious man fails, in the endeavor to become godlike. The rationalist, sentimentalist, and feminine ethic of compassion wins out over the desire for fame through conquest.’⁷² But he does so in the face of all the evidence, and in defiance of the novel that Mary Shelley actually wrote. While Euthanasia and Castruccio are clearly contrasting characters, the outcome of the novel shows that the sentimental woman fails just as clearly as the ambitious man, and, as Kelly points out, ‘[t]hat failure counts hard against romantic hopes for the thinking, autonomous, liberal subject of modernity.’⁷³ The world needs to change more thoroughly than could be imagined in fourteenth-century Italy, and more thoroughly it seems even than Mary Shelley can imagine as an expatriate Englishwoman in Italy in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Mary Shelley ends Euthanasia’s story not with her death but rather with a restatement of the cyclical view of history that had earlier been articulated by Euthanasia herself. She achieves this by moving the conclusion of *Valperga* ahead to a point two years after Euthanasia’s defeat, when Castruccio falls ill in battle and dies.⁷⁴ Change might be possibly in the future, but in the present, as in the past, there has only been disappointment and disillusionment. Blumberg possibly offers the best short statement summing up the whole novel: it ‘offer[s] no consolation and indeed outstrip[s] *Frankenstein* in despair.’⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality, Contingency, and Mary Shelley’, paragraph 36.

⁷¹ Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality’, paragraph 55.

⁷² James P. Carson, “A Sigh of Many Hearts”, 175.

⁷³ Theresa M. Kelly, ‘Romantic Temporality’, paragraph 53.

⁷⁴ Betty T. Bennett, ‘Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor’, 145.

⁷⁵ Jane Blumberg, *Mary Shelley’s Early Novels*, 4.

1.3. *Matilda*

The novella, *Matilda*, which follows a theme that was quite common in the writings of Romantic authors especially those close to Mary Shelley like Byron and her husband, must have so shocked Godwin that he felt the need to suppress it from publication. While P. B. Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* or *The Cenci* as well as Byron's *Manfred* and Shelley's own short story 'The Mourner' dealt with the same theme of incest it was *Matilda* that was felt to be so personally dangerous to Godwin and Shelley, that the former, who had probably learned from his own publication of his *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft that not every text is fit for the public to behold, felt the need to prevent its publication. Accordingly, *Matilda* was published for the very first time only in 1959. It is interesting to notice that a tendency towards Shelley's mystification of her husband can be traced this early on: even before his death Shelley clearly modelled the poet Woodville on Percy Shelley:

He was a poet. That name has so often been degraded that it will not convey the idea of all that he was. He was like a poet of old whom the muses had crowned in his cradle, and on whose lips bees had fed. As he walked among other men he seemed encompassed with a heavenly halo that divided him from and lifted him above them. It was his surpassing beauty, the dazzling fire of his eyes, and his words whose rich accents wrapped the listener in mute and ecstatic wonder, that made him transcend all others so that before him they appeared only formed to minister to his superior excellence. (*Matilda*, 191)

Even now, Shelley furnishes her husband with a literary halo and continues to notice that '[His own mind was constitutionally bent to a firmer belief in good than in evil and this feeling which must ever exhilarate the hopeless ever shone forth in his words' (*Matilda*, 195). *Matilda* for a short while feels soothed by Woodville's poetic language but in the end Shelley even this early on in her career establishes a difference between her own perception and that of her husband. *Matilda* realizes 'that all this was nothing, - a dream- a

shadow for which there was no reality for me' (*Matilda*, 196). When Matilda finally suggests suicide Woodville again in a very P. B. Shelleyan manner replies,

From my youth I have said, I will be virtuous, I will dedicate my life for the good of others; I will do my best to extirpate evil and if the spirit who protects ill should so influence circumstances that I should suffer through my endeavour, yet while there is hope and hope there ever must be, of success, cheerfully do I gird myself to my task. (*Matilda*, 202)

This does not change anything for Matilda: in the end she dies unconsolated and Woodville's idealism remains with him alone.

Matilda again introduces its main characters through their various styles of education. While her father enjoyed the usual high class education of private school (Eton) and college and yet 'discarded books [as] he believed that he had other lessons to learn than those which they could teach him' (*Matilda*, 152/3), Matilda's mother 'was well acquainted with the heroes of Greece and Rome or with those of England who had lived some hundred years ago, while she was nearly ignorant of the passing events of the day.' (*Matilda*, 154) Matilda herself grows up in Scotland, quite solitary with her cold aunt and one attendant as sole companions. She turns into a child of nature rambling through the wild landscapes around Loch Lomond. Again, this is Shelley's comment on the idea of the Romantic solitary genius. Matilda explains: 'As I grew older books in some degree supplied the place of human intercourse' (*Matilda*, 158). That aside, she receives a rather sexual education learning to play the harp and speak foreign languages. For Shelley it seems quite clear that this kind of solitary upbringing which leaves too much room for too vivid an imagination cannot be healthy and it plays a part in the immense tragedy that ends the novella.

After her husband died Shelley often thought of herself as experiencing an all but posthumous existence. In the chapters that follow I will examine the literary products of that posthumous life, beginning with *The Last Man* (1827). This is the novel in which

Mary Shelley probes most searchingly the relationship between the public and the private spheres, the nature of authorship, the kinship between novel and biography, and the struggle to preserve meaning in the face of an event, the plague, that seems to confirm finally the meaninglessness of human existence. This will be followed by a chapter on *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), Shelley's attempt to exploit but also to re-direct the spectacular popularity of the historical novel as it had been developed by Scott. Shelley challenges Scott's assumption that the novelist should, or should at any rate seem to, survey historical process with a wise disinterestedness, favouring instead a passionate engagement with history that has its origins as much in the historian's personal history as in her historical scholarship. For Shelley's parents and her husband education had a peculiar importance, as the instrument best able to secure the melioristic historical vision that they espoused and also as the instrument best adapted to dismantle the unjust differentiation between the sexes. I read *Lodore* (1835) as a novel primarily focused on the issue of education, but again in a manner that challenges as much as it reasserts the views of her family. Ethel's sexual education, an education unnervingly like the education preferred by Rousseau for young girls to which Shelley's mother had objected so strenuously, is contrasted with Fanny Derham's masculine education, but the novel manifestly fails to show the outcomes that Shelley's mother would have predicted. In my last chapter I read *Falkner* (1837) as the culmination of Shelley's lifelong interest in biography and in the moral responsibilities of the biographer. It is a novel which, as I shall show, offers as its ur-text *Hamlet*, the text that of all others most searchingly addresses the question of a child's relationship with their father. It is entirely appropriate that, as even the title of the novel lightly indicates, the other most important model for this, her last novel, is the most famous novel written by Shelley's father, *Things as They are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams*.

2. *The Last Man*

The Last Man is the first novel Mary Shelley wrote and published after the death of her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and was, at least in part, inspired by the same coterie out of which *Frankenstein* originated. Modern critics vary in their judgement of *The Last Man*, as they do with all of Shelley's later novels. On the one hand it is often read as a biographical work, or as a *roman à clef* designed as a memorial to Mary Shelley's dead husband and Byron. In the novel, a circle of friends, Lionel and his sister Perdita, Adrian (who is supposed to be modelled on Shelley), his sister Idris, and Lord Raymond (who is supposed to be modelled on Byron) try to preserve the happiness of their little circle, and at the same time to defend their country, when it is threatened by the outbreak of an incurable plague. In the end, Lionel alone remains, the sole survivor of the rage of the plague, and thus the Last Man. *The Last Man* is, like *Frankenstein*, a novel much concerned with creativity, but it accepts more wholeheartedly than the earlier novel P. B. Shelley's refusal to distinguish between the aesthetic and the social. For P. B. Shelley 'poet' is a general term comprehending artists of all kinds and also the 'institutors of laws and the founders of civil society'.⁷⁶ The novel also explores through its representation of the plague, humanity's powerlessness against the forces of nature. Moreover, *The Last Man* presents the reader with a topic that frequently returns throughout Mary Shelley's writings, the opposition of the private and public spheres of life.

So although the novel treads well-worn ground, taking its place within a flourishing sub-genre of last man literature that includes Thomas Hood's 'The Last Man', Byron's 'Darkness', the novel *The Last Man, or Omegarus and Syderia*, as well as various other publications that express a pessimistic worldview, stimulated by the failure of all the revolutions on which the Romantics had pinned their hopes, it still amply rewards

⁷⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry, The Major Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 677.

discussion. The novel has been represented as expressing ‘Shelley’s desire, after her husband’s death, to become the medium of his ideas, to write a novel worthy of him, to represent him by (as best as she could) becoming him.’⁷⁷ I shall argue rather that Mary Shelley in this as well as in her later novels quite clearly distinguishes her own arguments and thoughts from the notions and ideas associated with her husband, her father, her mother and other contemporaries. I agree with Goldsmith that ‘when this desire reaches its limit of stifling self-contradiction, the novel gives way to an independent feminine force that liberates itself from the masculine altogether – the plague that literally ends “man.”’⁷⁸

2.1. The Private and Public Spheres in *The Last Man*

The Last Man has often been discussed as a literary work that opposes the private and public spheres. Betty Bennett for example claims that it is ‘structured around politics civil and domestic.’⁷⁹ Nora Crook claims that it ‘dwell[s] on questions of power, responsibility and love.’⁸⁰ Joseph Lew connects the ‘breakdown of domestic ties’ with ‘the breakdown of civil institutions’, thus again bringing together the two spheres.⁸¹ Victoria Middleton suggests that ‘*The Last Man* depicts varieties of exile and gives both private and political causes for them,’⁸² whereas Anne Mellor finds that the novel ‘tests Mary Shelley’s ideology of the family against the realities of human egotism’ which in *The Last Man* are

⁷⁷ Steven Goldsmith, ‘Of Gender, Plague and Apocalypse: Mary Shelley’s “Last Man”’, *Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 4 No 1, 1990, 131.

⁷⁸ Goldsmith, ‘Of Gender, Plague and Apocalypse’, 131.

⁷⁹ Betty T. Bennett, ‘Radical Imaginings: Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, *Wordsworth Circle*, Vol 26 No. 3, 1995 Summer, 149.

⁸⁰ Nora Crook, ‘Introduction’, in *Mary Shelley’s Fictions from Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), xix-xxvi, xx.

⁸¹ Joseph Lew, ‘The Plague of Imperial Desire: Montesquieu, Gibbon, Brougham, and Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830* ed. Tim Fulford, Peter J Kiston (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 278.

⁸² Victoria Middleton, ‘Exile, Isolation, and Accommodation in *The Last Man*: The Strategies of a Survivor’, *Critical Essays on Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*. Ed. Mary Lowe-Evans (New York: G.K. Hall; London: Prentice Hall International, 1998), 168.

mostly defined through the public sphere.⁸³ This, in turn, is restricted to male protagonists and she accordingly interprets the novel as primarily a ‘critique of male egoism.’⁸⁴ Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor explores both areas in the context of theatricality in the novel when, for example, she says that ‘Perdita's antitheatricality rests on her perception that she loses the sympathy of her “real” husband and companion when he puts on the political mask.’⁸⁵ Kari Locke finds that in some characters the will to power is stronger than other human impulses, for example love.⁸⁶

Lord Raymond is the strongest example of such a character. He is the most ambitious representative of the public sphere in *The Last Man*: ‘The selected passion of the soul of Raymond was ambition. [...] earnest desire of distinction were the awakeners and nurses of his ambition’.⁸⁷ In the beginning of the novel he is introduced as a successful war hero returning from Greece. But he is far from content with his achievements and spurred on by further ambition. He characterizes himself: ‘I intend to be a warrior, a conqueror; Napoleon’s name shall vail to mine; and enthusiasts, instead of visiting his rocky grave, and exalting the merits of the fallen, shall adore my majesty, and magnify my illustrious achievements’” (*LM*, 40). He closely resembles *Valperga*’s Castruccio in ambition and hubris. In order to realize his ambitious plans, he hopes to marry Idris, the former princess of England, and in doing so aspires to become king of England himself. One of his schemes to achieve this involves declaring Adrian, the legal heir to the throne, should royalty ever be reinstated, mad and unfit to rule:

⁸³ Anne K. Mellor, ‘Love Guilt and Reparation: *The Last Man*’, in *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), 148.

⁸⁴ Mellor, ‘Love Guilt and Reparation’, 151.

⁸⁵ Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, ‘Performing History, Performing Humanity in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 42 No. 4, Autumn 2002, electronic version, no pagination, 3 (on printout).

⁸⁶ Kari E. Lokke, ‘The Last Man’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 119.

⁸⁷ Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. Hugh J. Luke Jr. (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 106. All other quotations are from this edition and will from now on be quoted in the text.

Lord Raymond was the favourite of the ex-queen, her daughter's destined husband. Nay, more, that this aspiring noble revived the claim of the house of Windsor to the crown, and that, on the event of Adrian's incurable disorder and his marriage with his sister, the brow of the ambitious Raymond might be encircled with the magic ring of regality (*LM*, 28).

In these schemes he cares little about the feelings of others or even his own:

'Power therefore was the aim of all his endeavours; aggrandizement the mark at which he forever shot. In open ambition or close intrigue, his end was the same – to attain the first station in his own country' (*LM*, 27). He is willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve his glorious plans. He reflects:

'Love! I must steel my heart against *that*; expel it from its tower of strength, barricade it out: the fountain of love must cease to play, its waters be dried up, and all passionate thoughts attendant on it die – that is to say, the love which would rule me, not that which I rule' (*LM*, 39).

In saying this he declares that he is willing to control his innermost feelings, his own personal desires, in order to achieve his public ambitions. For him love is acceptable only as means to gain power over others. As soon, however, as he feels vulnerable himself, love has to be subdued. Raymond, who, according to Morton Paley, is the 'embodiment of a will to power', uses terms of warfare and power like 'tower of strength' and 'barricade it out' in order to underline his inability to admit any possibility of relationship except that of ruling or being ruled.⁸⁸ He also refers to love as 'the tyrant and the tyrant-queller; love, until now my conqueror, now my slave' (*LM*, 39). It is as if Raymond thinks that merely deciding not to love will make him inaccessible for feelings or sentiments. Here, he uses the words 'conqueror' and 'slave' which again show the relations of power that are so important to him.

⁸⁸ Morton D. Paley, 'Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*: Apocalypse without Millennium', in *The Other Mary Shelley* ed. Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 112.

Raymond also confesses to Lionel that he does not love Idris but he is certain that he and Idris will learn to love each other after marriage: “‘What a question,’” replied he laughing. “‘She will of course, as I shall her, when we are married.’” “‘You begin late,’” said I, ironically, “‘marriage is usually considered the grave, and not the cradle of love’” (*LM*, 39). But Raymond believes that he can rule his feelings and the feelings of others, just as he intends to rule over England. For him the society of his future wife is nothing more than a means to an end.

This attitude only changes, when he is conquered by the foe he fears most of all and he falls deeply in love with Perdita. At one point, when he has not quite accepted his feelings, he confides in Lionel: ‘What can I do? My dearest hopes appear to be near their fulfilment. The ex-queen gives me Idris; Adrian is totally unfitted to succeed to the earldom, and that earldom in my hands becomes a kingdom’ (*LM*, 38). He tries to convince himself that he is not in love with Perdita, when he says: “‘I can do this – I can marry Idris’” (*LM*, 39). Confusion over his unfocused desires – that is desires which are inconsistent with his ambitions – makes him unsure about what is more important to him, private happiness or public success:

Perdita’s name was not mentioned; yet could I not doubt that love for her caused the vacillation of purpose that he exhibited. And who was so worthy of love as my noble-minded sister? Who deserved that hand of this self-exalted king more than she whose glance belonged to a queen of nations? who loved him as he did her; notwithstanding that disappointment quelled her passion, and ambition held strong combat with his (*LM*, 40).

He again confides in Lionel:

I appear to have strength, power, victory; standing as a dome-supporting column stands; and I am – a reed! I have ambition, and that attains its aim; my nightly dreams are realized, my waking hopes fulfilled; a kingdom awaits my acceptance, my enemies are overthrown. But here,’ and he struck his heart with violence, ‘here is the rebel, here the stumbling block; this overruling heart, which I may drain of its living blood; but, while one fluttering pulsation remains, I am its slave’ (*LM*, 45).

Calling his heart a ‘rebel’ and a ‘stumbling block’ again shows that he understands his inner world in the same way that he understands the body politic, as an arena in which a battle for power is staged. However, now the power relations inside Raymond seem to have shifted, he is no longer ruler over his heart, but its ‘slave.’ At first he is completely unable to accept this — he feels helpless. Raymond asks: “‘Did we form ourselves, choosing our dispositions, and our powers? I find myself, for one, as a stringed instrument with chords and stops – but I have no power to turn the pegs, or pitch my thoughts to a higher or lower key’” (*LM*, 47). In using this musical metaphor, Raymond does not focus on the harmony of music as a type of harmony that should exist between lovers but rather on the power he does not possess either to ‘turn the pegs’ or to rule over his own feelings. Furthermore, he claims, that it cannot be considered an act of his own free will, if he now jeopardizes his prospects of becoming England’s reigning monarch (*LM*, 47). Thus, he weighs ‘between the possession of a crown, and of her, whose excellence and affection transcended the worth of a kingdom’ (*LM*, 47). When he finds Perdita in distress his decision is quickly made. He tells her: “‘I do not deny that I have balanced between you and the highest hope that mortal man can entertain; but I do so no longer. Take me – mould me to your will, possess my heart and soul to all eternity’” (*LM*, 48). First he resembles Victor Frankenstein in his ambitious plans and will to perform them but then he alters his course. Unlike Frankenstein he does not entirely shut out the private sphere but instead he allows Perdita to create a different man, a domestic man to her liking, removed from public offices and political ambition. For him it is either mould or be moulded, there is no alternative possibility. A relationship between two equals does not for him seem a worthy achievement: there always has to be one dominant and one dominated person and in the beginning he allows Perdita to be dominant. However, in the next sentence, he threatens for the first time, as he continues to do at several points throughout the novel, to exile himself from his country: ‘If you refuse to contribute to my happiness, I quit England tonight, and will never set foot in it again’ (*LM*, 48). Leaving England and abandoning all

responsibilities towards others always seems to be an easy way out for Raymond. Luckily for him, Perdita responds with her own love and Lionel is surprised how love changes both into ‘prattling, playful children, both losing their characteristic dignity in the fullness of mutual contentment’ (*LM*, 48).

Perdita’s love – which Raymond refers to as ‘that which is worth all the crowns of the east and presidentships of the west’ (*LM*, 40), again showing that he can understand private happiness only in terms of his public ambitions – inspires him to become at least for a while an entirely domestic person. It is enough for him to live with Perdita and their friends.

Raymond, the ambitious, restless Raymond, reposed midway on the great highroad of life, and was content to give up all his schemes of sovereignty and fame, to make one of us, the flowers of the field. His kingdom was the heart of Perdita, his subjects her thoughts; by her he was loved, respected as a superior being, obeyed, waited on. No office, no devotion, no watching was irksome to her as it regarded him (*LM*, 65).

This elaborate metaphor, again, shows clearly how Raymond has simply transferred into the private realm an understanding of reality that remains, at root, public and political. He regards Perdita as his ‘kingdom’, his possession, and her thoughts as his ‘subjects.’ He is her ‘superior being’ and he expects her to obey him and wait on him, so for him love can still only be expressed in terms of power. He may regard Perdita as his kingdom now, but the metaphor suggests that even at this point he is conscious that she is only a diminished version of the kingdom over which he had once aspired to rule: He now is one of the ‘flowers of the field’ who ‘toil not, neither do they spin’ (Matthew, 6, 28). Such flowers, of course, have Jesus’s sanction, but the allusion may indicate that Raymond still harbours a guilty sense that in devoting himself to domesticity he is wasting his talents. However that may be,

[d]esire of renown, and presumptuous ambition, had characterized his youth. The one he had acquired in Greece; the other he had sacrificed to love. His intellect

found sufficient field for exercise in his domestic circle, whose members, all adorned by refinement and literature, were many of them, like himself distinguished by genius (*LM*, 85).

This state of mind is only temporary and ambition resurfaces with the prospect of becoming Lord Protector of England: ‘Yet active life was the genuine soil for his virtues; and he sometimes suffered tedium from the monotonous succession of events in our retirement’ (*LM*, 85). This does not come as a surprise. Five years of domestic happiness are summed up in only a few short paragraphs before Raymond feels his ambitions rising to the surface again: ‘the idea of embarking in a career, so congenial to his early habits and cherished wishes, made him as before energetic and bold’ (*LM*, 69). Kari Lokke correctly remarks that in Raymond the will to power is stronger than all other human impulses such as love, compassion, generosity or justice.⁸⁹ In this, he closely resembles the hero of Shelley’s next novel, Perkin Warbeck, who also very often puts his personal ambition before the well being of humanity. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

When Raymond wins the election, Perdita feels that this might be the beginning of the end of their affectionate relationship. Even before his election she has negative premonitions: ‘She tried to rouse herself, but her eyes every now and then filled with tears, and she looked wistfully on Raymond and her girl, as if fearful that some evil would betide them. And so she felt’ (*LM*, 66). Or she exclaims:

‘Scenes of happiness! scenes sacred to devoted love, when shall I see you again! and when I see ye, shall I be still the beloved and joyous Perdita, or shall I, heart-broken and lost, wander among your groves, the ghost of what I am!’ (*LM*, 66)

This is the first time that Perdita senses that domestic and public responsibilities might conflict. In the end, Adrian’s prediction is fulfilled: ‘Lord Raymond was never born to be a drone in the hive, and to find content in our pastoral life’ (*LM*, 68). He becomes

⁸⁹ See Lokke, ‘*The Last Man*’, 119.

Lord Protector and his private life becomes subordinate to his public office. Nonetheless, Perdita stands by Raymond and engages fully with his public duties: ‘Raymond and she had been inseparable; each project was discussed with her, each plan approved by her’ (*LM*, 84). For a brief moment it seems as if they might successfully reconcile the public and private aspects of their lives. Perdita has grandly benevolent ambitions for the betterment of the human condition:

disease was to be banished; labour lightened of its heaviest burden. Nor did this seem extravagant. The arts of life, and the discoveries of science had augmented in a ratio which left all calculation behind; food sprung up, so to say spontaneously – machines existed to supply with facility every want of the population. (*LM*, 76)

These of course are ideas inspired by Godwin and P. B. Shelley and Perdita and Raymond become for a moment perfectibilarians in the same mould as Mary’s father and husband.⁹⁰ So Raymond’s ambitions have not suddenly vanished but they have changed their focus:

Raymond was to inspire [men] with his beneficial will, and the mechanism of society, once systematised according to faultless rules, would never again swerve into disorder. For these hopes he abandoned his long-cherished ambition of being enregistered in the annals of nations as a successful warrior; laying aside his sword, peace and its enduring glories became his aim –the title he coveted was that of the benefactor of his country. (*LM*, 76)

Raymond, who has won fame as a military hero, seems to have been converted into a devout Godwinian.

Among his first more concrete projects, with the aim of educating humanity, is a national gallery: ‘the edifice was to be the great ornament of his protectorship’ (*LM*, 76). He establishes a competition for the design of the building and the secret architect of the winning entry turns out to be Evadne, the Greek princess who was and still is secretly in love with Raymond. In the beginning of this reconnection Raymond is only anxious to relieve Evadne’s ‘wretchedness.’ But even as he does so he takes the first step towards

⁹⁰ Perfectibilism being the doctrine that man, individual and social, is progressing indefinitely towards physical, mental, and moral perfection, an aim and doctrine that both Godwin, and Percy Shelley, inspired by his older mentor, strongly believed in.

destroying his and Perdita's private happiness: for 'some motive for which he did not account' (*LM*, 79) he keeps secret from Perdita his discovery of Evadne. When he later starts a clandestine affair with her this again shows that he has no control over his passions, whatsoever. Morton Paley remarks that 'Raymond enjoys the exercise of power and is both enlightened and intelligent enough to employ it benevolently, but he is not self-disciplined enough to continue long to do so'.⁹¹ He fails to realize that his relationship with Evadne threatens at once his ability to discharge his public office and his domestic happiness. Raymond is really absorbed by his work and he does not realize in time that his weakness for Evadne not only endangers his and Perdita's happiness but also his position in the state.

Evadne is not all that different from Raymond: she is scheming – for example, when she aims 'at the title and power of Princess of Wallachia.' (*LM*, 81) Another mutual vice is pride. She, for example, does not accept Raymond's help when she desperately needs it she also does not apply for help to her countrymen:

'Shall the daughter of the noble, though prodigal Zaimi, appear a beggar before her compeers or inferiors – superiors she had none. Shall I bow my head before them and with servile gesture sell my nobility for life?' (*LM*, 80)

Whereas Raymond and Perdita have a relationship based on difference, Raymond and Evadne are attracted by their likeness one to another. But unlike Raymond, Evadne defines herself completely through her feelings and passions. Her unrequited love for Raymond makes her leave England in the first place and leads to the tragic events that finally make her return to this country. Here she secretly indulges her love:

Evadne loved Raymond. He was the hero of her imagination, the image carved by love in the unchanged texture of her heart. Seven years ago, in her youthful prime, she had become attached to him; he had served her country against the Turks. (*LM*, 81)

⁹¹ Paley, 'Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*: Apocalypse without Millennium', 112.

Her only love apart from Raymond is for her native country which she was forced to leave. Her patriotism makes her love the hero Raymond all the more. In England, Evadne does not actively try to interfere with Raymond's domestic life. In fact, she tries to stay hidden but Raymond discovers her whereabouts. For Evadne it would have been enough to give him the blueprint for his national gallery as a secret love offering: 'Nothing is so precious to a woman's heart as the glory and excellence of him she loves; thus in every horror Evadne revelled in his fame and prosperity' (*LM*, 82). She also 'triumphed in the idea of bestowing, unknown and forgotten as she was, a benefit upon him she loved; and with enthusiastic pride looked forward to the accomplishment of a work of hers, which immortalized in stone, would go down to posterity stamped with the name of Raymond' (*LM*, 83). She, in a way, represents a textbook definition of Romantic love. In her servile attitude towards Raymond she does not, although she is by no means a domestic figure, differ much from Perdita who herself is defined solely by her domestic role and by her ambition to satisfy Raymond's every need. Both Evadne and Perdita are willing to subsume their own identities in that of the man they love. Anne Mellor suggests that there may be an autobiographical basis for this when she describes the love Mary Shelley felt for her husband as 'constant and self-destructive'.⁹²

In engaging in an affair with Evadne Raymond might seem to be a proponent of free love as advocated, for example, by Byron and P. B. Shelley.⁹³ Percy Shelley does promote this kind of love explicitly in his *Epipsychidion* which he dedicated to Emilia Viviani, when he writes:

True Love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding that grows bright.
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light.
[...]
If you divide suffering and dross, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away;
If you divide pleasure and love and thought,

⁹² Mellor, 'Love Guilt and Reparation', 154.

⁹³ William A. Walling, *Mary Shelley* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), 96.

Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
 How much, while any yet remains unshared,
 O pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared (ll.160-183).⁹⁴

Here Percy Shelley argues that love is not lessened when it is divided between more than one lover. But Mary Shelley seems to represent Raymond's relationship with Evadne not as an expression of a philosophical position but simply as an affair. Raymond tries to keep it a secret and feels constantly guilty, as Shelley surely wished her own husband felt during his various love affairs. As soon as Perdita discovers the relationship, she leaves Raymond, Shelley herself silently suffered from her husband's infidelities, yet never left.

After his domestic bliss is shattered by his inability to restrain his passions, Raymond finally returns to Greece where he again devotes himself to the life of a soldier: he becomes, as Byron had done before him, a leader in the Greek War of Independence against the Turks. Or, as Maria Koundourra puts it:

Evadne's affair with the philhellene Raymond brings down the sign of the male's social power—the family and its ideal of monogamy—as it also brings down the entire English government. His domestic private and public life ruined, Raymond goes to Greece in pursuit of personal glory only to end up dying conquering a plague-ridden and deserted city.⁹⁵

His decision to leave England, it seems, is taken out of pique or out of despair, and represents a rejection of society in favour of solitude, and of concern for others in favour of self-absorption. Paradoxically, he does that by entering another form of society, the army. He still fights for a cause he believes in but at the cost of leaving his love and responsibilities behind. For a while Raymond seems to be a Romantic heroic leader and he is even briefly reunited with Perdita but when Evadne, who again secretly follows him to support his and her own native cause, curses him shortly before she dies herself, he readily accepts this curse as his fate and dies in an explosion when he enters the deserted city of

⁹⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Epipsychidion*, *The Major Works*, 517.

⁹⁵ Maria Koundourra, 'The Limits of Civility: Culture, Nation, and Modernity in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*', *Colby Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 2, 2001 June, 12.

Constantinople. Shortly before his death he declares himself ‘the victim of ambition’ (*LM*, 141). There will be further discussions of such victims of ambition, who, in some instances, also try to forget or overcome their private and personal crises in the following chapters about *Perkin Warbeck* and *Falkner*. For Joseph Lew the breakdown of domestic ties symbolizes the breakdown of civil institutions.⁹⁶ In this instance this equation seems to work. When Raymond’s domestic life breaks down and he leaves for Greece, he also leaves his nation leaderless, if only for a short while. For Raymond neither a public nor a private mode of living brings lasting happiness. In this he is not unlike the two other male main characters of the novel, Adrian and Lionel.

2.2. Biography and *The Last Man*

Although other characters like Raymond express Shelleyan ideas or impersonate some of Percy Shelley’s traits, Adrian is certainly the character in *The Last Man* that most closely resembles Mary Shelley’s husband. Some critics argue that because Sir Timothy Shelley denied her the opportunity of writing a full biography of Percy Shelley, she wrote *The Last Man* as a means of circumventing his prohibition. Through Adrian she found a way of expressing some of her beliefs about her late husband. An early description of Adrian could easily be a description of Percy in his school days:

His sensibility and courtesy fascinated every one. His vivacity, intelligence, and active spirit of benevolence, completed the conquest. Even at this early age, he was deep read and imbued with the spirit of high philosophy. This spirit gave a tone of irresistible persuasion to his intercourse with others, so that he seemed like an inspired musician, who struck, with unerring skill, the ‘lyre of mind,’ and produced thence divine harmony. In person, he hardly appeared of this world; his slight frame was overinformed by the soul that dwelled within; he was all mind. (*LM*, 18)

Adrian, the perfectibilarian dreamer who hopes to save the world by sheer willpower, is clearly modelled on Percy Bysshe Shelley. He is described as ‘a tall, slim, fair boy,’ ‘with

⁹⁶ Lew, ‘The Plague of Imperial Desire’, 278.

a physiognomy expressive of the excess of sensibility and refinement'. He is, almost literally, given a halo: 'the morning sunbeams tinged with gold his silken hair, and spread light and glory over his beaming countenance' (*LM*, 17). Clearly, Adrian is offered as an idealized version of P. B. Shelley. Like Percy Shelley, he is intent on the abolition of monarchy, and like him, Adrian has absolute confidence in the efficacy of the human will: 'For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows of death, soothing the bed of disease and wiping away tears of agony' (*LM*, 54). It is of course a confidence that P. B. Shelley had first learned from Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin. Many of those who had reviewed her husband's poems in his lifetime and most of those who noticed his death, had represented him as a crazed enthusiast, a radical atheist whose private life was a decisive commentary on the consequences of attempting to live without faith. Mary Shelley retaliates by constructing her own rival 'Shelley myth' of a man so dedicated to the service of humanity that he neglects himself to the point of self-sacrifice.

This is how Lionel, the narrator of the novel, perceives Adrian when he first meets him. Lionel is often read and interpreted, at least in part, as Mary Shelley's own alter ego. The description of him seems to align Adrian with mind rather than body and with the world of books rather than the world of action. He is 'imbued beyond his years with learning and talent' (*LM*, 13). Much to the dislike of his mother, 'in early days he became a republican from principle' (*LM*, 22). This again, recalls Percy Shelley and his father's disapproval of his liberal ideas. But apart from taking on Lionel as a friend and pupil, Adrian never really attempts to put his ideas into action: 'In solitude, and through many wanderings afar from the haunts of men, he matured his views for the reform of the English government, and the improvement of the people' (*LM*, 30). He also intends 'to introduce a perfect system of republican government into England' (*LM*, 30). Yet, as Morton Paley observes, he reveals an 'inability to unite knowledge and power'.⁹⁷ Adrian, born as a public figure, as the potential crown prince of England still has more power than

⁹⁷ Paley, 'Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*: Apocalypse without Millennium', 112.

most men in the country. He also has more knowledge and yet it seems impossible for him to unite his knowledge with power and put his ideas into action. Rather he lets himself be ruled by his passions and lets his unrequited love for Evadne drive him into a madness that makes him unable to act for the benefit of mankind.

Only after Lionel visits his friend in his seclusion and sits up for three nights at his bedside does he recover from a fever and regain his mental powers. The convalescent Adrian soon takes up once more his Shelleyan ideas:

Look into the mind of man, where wisdom reigns enthroned; where imagination, the painter, sits, with his pencil dipt in hues lovelier than those of sunset, adorning familiar life with glowing tints. What a noble boon, worthy the giver, is the imagination! it takes from reality this leaden hue: it envelopes all thought and sensation in a radiant veil, and with an hand of beauty beckons us from the sterile seas of life, to her gardens, and bowers, and glades of bliss. (*LM*, 53)

In this quotation, P. B. Shelley's idea of the power of the human mind and imagination is borrowed by Adrian but in him it seems to support something close to political quietism.

Adrian dedicates himself to the benefit of humanity borrowing still more Shelleyan and Godwinian ideas:

‘Oh, that death and sickness were banished from our earthly home! that hatred, tyranny, and fear could no longer make their lair in the human heart! that each man might find a brother in his fellow, and a nest of repose amid the wide plains of his inheritance! that the source of tears were dry, and that lips might no longer form expressions of sorrow.

...

For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows of death, soothing the bed of disease, and wiping away the tears of agony. And what is each human being worth, if he do not put forth his strength to aid his fellow creatures? My soul is a fading spark, my nature frail as a spent wave; but I dedicate all of intellect and strength that remains to me, to do one work, and take upon me the task, as far as I am able, of bestowing blessings on my fellow-men!’ (*LM*, 54).

Adrian seems finally to find the strength to unite knowledge and power, but he is not prompted to any immediate action. He returns to his family and friends happily living in their enclosed circle in Windsor, in which Adrian's ideas seem to be partially realised:

‘[j]ealousy and disquiet were unknown among us; nor did a fear or hope ever disturb our tranquillity. Others said; We might be happy – we said – we are’ (*LM*, 64/65).

That is until Raymond points out that ‘we [Lionel and himself] are married men, and find employment sufficient in amusing our wives, and dancing our children. But Adrian is alone, wifeless, childless, unoccupied, I have long observed him. He pines for want of some interest in life’ (*LM*, 67). He suggests that Adrian should become Lord Protector of England:

‘Believe me, he was destined to be author of infinite good to his native England: Has she not bestowed on him every gift in prodigality? – birth, wealth, talent, goodness? Does not every one love and admire him? and does he not delight singly in such efforts as manifest his love to all?’ (*LM*, 67)

Such an office would seem to give Adrian every opportunity to put his ideas into practice, to use his knowledge for the good of mankind. Yet Adrian does not seem attracted by the prospect, he rather accuses Lionel:

‘Do you cabal also against me,’ said he, laughing; ‘and will you make common cause with Raymond, in dragging a poor visionary from the clouds to surround him with the fire-works and blasts of earthly grandeur, instead of heavenly rays and airs? I thought you knew me better.’

‘I do know you better,’ I replied, ‘than to think that you would be happy in such a situation; but the good you would do to others may be an inducement, since the time probably arrived when you can put your theories into practice, and you may bring about such reformation and change, as will conduce to that perfect system of government which you delight to portray.’

‘You speak of an almost-forgotten dream,’ said Adrian, his countenance slightly clouding as he spoke; ‘the visions of my boyhood have long since faded in the light of reality; I know now that I am not a man fitted to govern nations; sufficient for me, if I keep in wholesome rule the little kingdom of my own mortality’ (*LM*, 68)

So Adrian declines the possibility of leading an active, public life, although this might enable him to fulfil his youthful dreams. He prefers to live in his domestic circle among his friends and family: ‘The more Adrian reasoned upon this scheme [to make Raymond Lord Protector instead of himself], the more feasible it appeared. His own determination *never to enter into public life* was insurmountable, and the delicacy of his health was a sufficient

argument against it' (*LM*, 69).⁹⁸ It seems as though Adrian has made up his mind to pursue his own private happiness in a closed circle of friends. Yet private life does not offer him complete happiness since he remains single: 'Adrian, the matchless brother of my soul, the sensitive and excellent Adrian, loving all, and beloved by all, yet seemed destined not to find the half of himself, which was to complete his happiness' (*LM*, 65). In this very elaborate way Shelley comments on her husband's idealism and his absolute inability to put it into action or change society through his writings. Yet, in this, her disguised biography, she is not reduced to biographical truth and finds a way of depicting Percy as she would have preferred him to be.

Despite his resolutions Adrian enters public life twice. The first instance is when Raymond asks:

'Adrian, I am about to return to Greece, to become again a soldier, perhaps a conqueror. Will you accompany me? You will behold new scenes; see new people; witness the mighty struggle there going forward between civilization and barbarism; behold, and perhaps direct the efforts of a young and vigorous population, for liberty and order. Come with me. I have expected you. I waited for this moment; all is prepared; will you accompany me?'
'I will,' replied Adrian. (*LM*, 110)

Without reflection Adrian consents to be part of this adventure, which seems in him atypical behaviour. For a year he serves as a 'volunteer under his friend' (*LM*, 116). His sudden fascination with the Greek cause again recalls Percy Shelley who himself was a philhellene, yet one in words rather than deeds.⁹⁹

I shall not be suspected of being averse to the Greek cause; I know and feel its necessity; it is beyond every other good cause. I have defended it with my sword, and was willing that my spirit should be breathed out in its defence; freedom is of more worth than life, and the Greeks do well to defend their privilege unto death (*LM*, 116).

⁹⁸ my emphasis.

⁹⁹ See for example *Hellas*.

Adrian fights for a cause that he believes is just. Yet his first excursion into public life also opens his eyes. He realizes that the Turks and Greeks share the same feelings and he returns wounded and much weakened to Windsor. It is, however, not only his body that is weak. His belief in the essential goodness of man has been weakened also:

I have learnt in Greece 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 contain its full numbers. (*LM*, 116)

Shelley thus suggests that an excursion into real action might have helped her husband discover that his idealistic notions might sound good in theory, but that the practice of warfare, for example, clearly demonstrates human ‘imperfectibility’.

Adrian’s first entry into public life results only in disillusion. Yet he does not give up and continues toying with his benevolent ideas and ideals until England is conquered by the plague. This plague causes Raymond’s successor, the scared Ryland, to give up his public responsibilities and return to his isolated country estate in a selfish attempt to evade the plague. Consequently, there is nobody capable left to guide the English people but Lionel and Adrian, and only now does Adrian finally choose to assume an active role and lead his country.

Anne McWhir believes that the plague and the particular problems it poses ‘demand[s] political decisions and political action for which Verney has neither the skill nor the inclination’.¹⁰⁰ And yet, when Adrian asks Lionel to suggest him as a candidate for the office of Lord Protector, Lionel for the first and only time himself briefly enters the public sphere. He recalls:

for the first time [I] saw the full extent of my task, and I was overwhelmed by what I had brought on myself. Ryland had deserted his post through fear of the plague: from the same fear Adrian had no competitor. And I nearest kinsman of the Earl of Windsor, was to propose his election. I was to thrust this selected and matchless

¹⁰⁰ Anne McWhir, ‘Introduction’, in *The Last Man*, ed. Anne McWhir (Ontario; London: Broadview Press, 1996), xxviii.

friend into the post of danger- impossible! the die was cast- I would offer myself as candidate. (*LM*, 183)

Unlike Adrian, who wants to improve the lot of all humanity, Lionel only has the immediate protection of Adrian, his best friend and teacher, in mind. Even earlier in the novel, he only thinks of this single person's well being:

My fears for Adrian were ceaseless; August had come; and the symptoms of plague increased rapidly in London. It was deserted by all who possessed the power of removing; and he, the brother of my soul, was exposed to the perils from which all but slaves enchained by circumstances fled. He remained to combat the fiend- his side unguarded, his toils unshared- infection might even reach him, and he die unattended and alone. (*LM*, 180)

This bears out Kevin Hutchings's description of Lionel as 'a most admirable character' and a 'faithful supporter of his friends'.¹⁰¹ However, it also confirms Anne McWhir's contention that Lionel is by no means fit to rule over a whole nation. He simply cares too much about individuals, especially his family and friends. In this indeed, he seems closely modelled on Mary Shelley herself.

Adrian on the other hand who, as Raymond had pointed out earlier, is not married and does not have an immediate family to protect, regards the whole nation as the family that stands in need of his protection. Yet, that does not mean that his own flesh and blood in the form of Idris is not equally important to him. So he approaches Lionel:

'That country and my beloved sister are all I have: I will protect the first—the latter I commit to your charge. If I survive, and she be lost, I were far better dead. Preserve her—for her own sake I know that you will—if you require any other spur, think that, in preserving her, you preserve me'. (*LM*, 185)

Once he has entrusted his sister to Lionel, Adrian feels free to devote himself wholly to his country, and he agrees to assume the Lord Protectorship:

¹⁰¹ Kevin Hutchings, "A Dark Image in a Phantasmagoria": Pastoral Idealism, Prophecy, and Materiality in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism*, Vol. 10 No. 2, 2004, 233.

To England and to Englishmen I dedicate myself. If I can save one of her mighty spirits from the deadly shaft; if I can ward disease from one of her smiling cottages, I shall not have lived in vain. (*LM*, 179)

Again he is full of hope and ideas, and he even for the very first time gives indications of his own personal ambition:

I can enchain the plague in limits, and set a term to the misery it would occasion; courage, forbearance, and watchfulness, are the forces I bring towards this great work.

'O, I shall be something now! From my birth I have aspired like the eagle- but unlike the eagle my wings have failed, and my vision has been blinded. Disappointment and sickness have hitherto held dominion over me; twin born with me, my *would*, was forever enchained by the *shall not*, of these my tyrants. (*LM*, 179)

However, his ambition is different from Raymond's who exclusively sought personal fame and glory. Adrian's ambition involves the whole of mankind and yet he does not seek personal fame. All he wants to contribute to is human betterment and an improvement of the human situation. Finally, he feels able to function in a public role, not in pursuit of glory, but of a better life for everybody:

The choice is with us; let us but will it, and our habitation becomes a paradise. For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows of death, soothing the bed of disease, and wiping away the tears of agony. And what is each human being worth, if he do not put forth his strength to aid his fellow creatures? My soul is a fading spark, my nature frail as a spent wave; but I dedicate all of my intellect and strength that remains to me, to that one work, and take upon me the task, as far as I am able, of bestowing blessings on my fellow-men (*LM*, 54).

Significantly, speeches such as these are patchworks pieced together by Mary Shelley from her husband's poems and ideas. Adrian throughout the novel dedicates himself to his fellow men more than once: from early childhood he has entertained dreams of introducing the perfect form of government to his native country. But he made no attempt to realize such dreams preferring simply to put them into practice in his own family circle and to continue to toy with pretty thoughts and notions. Now, however, he feels that the

circumstances might offer a possibility for him to realize his dreams within the wider framework of a whole nation:

‘Let this last but twelve months,’ said Adrian; ‘and earth will become a paradise. The energies of men were before directed to the destruction of his species: they now aim at its liberation and preservation. Man cannot repose, and his restless aspirations will now bring forth good instead of evil’. (*LM*, 159)

At this critical moment Adrian finally gathers the strength to become the leader he was destined to be by birth. He agrees to assume a leadership that, as he realises, no-one else would in the existing circumstances accept:

‘And before God . . . do I receive it! No one will canvass for this honour now – none envy my danger or labours. Deposit your powers in my hands. Long have I fought with death, and much’ (he stretched out his thin hand) ‘much have I suffered in this struggle. It is not by flying, but by facing the enemy, that we can conquer. If my last combat is now about to be fought, and I am to be worsted – so let it be!’. (*LM*, 177)

He adapts a language of warfare not unlike the one Raymond uses, talking of ‘powers’, referring to the plague as an ‘enemy,’ and indicating that he intends to fight to the last. And yet, this passage confirms that he is not concerned with his personal wellbeing or the possibility of going down in history. He does not even care whether he is himself defeated or not, as long as he can save mankind. Like Raymond and Lionel, he chooses to do what he does, because he feels a sense of duty. At one point, he even, like Raymond, assumes command of the troops. Yet unlike Raymond:

He was full of care. It was small relief to him that our discipline should gain us success in such a conflict; while plague still hovered to equalize the conqueror and the conquered, it was not victory that he desired, but bloodless peace. (*LM*, 216)

Adrian’s most important struggle is to safeguard in the face of the plague that notion that every individual life has a value:

Pardon, succour, and brotherly love await your repentance. You are dear to us, because you wear the frail shape of humanity; each one among you will find a

friend and host among these forces. Shall man be the enemy of man, while plague, the foe to all, even now is above us, triumphing in our butchery, more cruel than her own? (*LM*, 218)

When he finally leaves the family circle he is used to, he seems to become a different person. The sickly young man, who was never in good health, finds an occupation that demands all his strength. One might think that single-handedly assuming the burden of governing the whole country would weaken him but the opposite is true:

the energy of his purpose informed his body with strength, the solemn joy of enthusiasm and self-devotion illuminated his countenance; and the weakness of his physical nature seemed to pass from him, as the cloud of humanity did, in the ancient fable, from the divine lover of Semele (*LM*, 178).

Passages such as these seem to bear out Terence Dawson's suggestion that Adrian represents qualities that Mary Shelley wished belonged to P. B. Shelley, rather than the qualities that he might reasonably be supposed to have had, and accordingly projected onto him after his death. Thus she recollects Shelley as she would have him be.¹⁰²

For Lionel it becomes clear that in becoming Lord Protector Adrian finds the role that he was born for:

How lovely is devotion! Here was a youth, royally sprung, bred in luxury, by nature averse to the usual struggles of a public life, and now, in time of danger, at a period when to live was the utmost scope of the ambitious, he, the beloved and heroic Adrian, made, in sweet simplicity, an offer to sacrifice himself for the public good. The very idea was generous and noble, -- but, beyond this, his unpretending manner, his entire want of the assumption of virtue, rendered his act ten times more touching. (*LM*, 182)

As Lord Protector, Adrian is not afraid of visiting sick beds and plague hospitals. He offers consolation wherever it is needed. He even manages to convince the rich and noble to plough up their pleasure grounds and convert them to agricultural use. Adrian's aim is to foster hope and to create a society in which all the citizens help one another. He even

¹⁰² Terence Dawson, 'Re-Collecting Shelley: A Reading of Mary Shelley's *Last Man*', in *Shelley 1792-1992*, ed. James Hogg (Mellen: Salzburg, 1993), 250.

partly succeeds, but he can find no protection against the plague, and the population continues to shrink. Consequently, he decides to lead his people out of England, hoping to find a plague free environment. He leads his people to the continent, and at great personal risk manages to reconcile the warring factions into which the nation had divided. Also, he tries to give hope wherever he can, and yet he himself recognizes that his endeavour is hopeless:

Nature, or nature's favourite, this lovely earth, presented her most unrivalled beauties in resplendent and sudden exhibition. Below, far, far below, even as it were in the yawning abyss of the ponderous globe, lay the placid and azure expanse of lake Lemane; vine-covered hills hedged it in, and behind dark mountains in cone-like shape, or irregular cyclopean wall, served for further defence. But beyond and high above all, as if the spirits of the air had suddenly unveiled their bright abodes, placed in scaleless altitude in the stainless sky, heaven-kissing, companions of the unattainable ether, were the glorious Alps, clothed in dazzling robes of light by the setting sun. And, as if the world's wonders were never to be exhausted, their vast immensities, their jagged crags, and roseate painting, appeared again in the lake below, dipping their proud heights beneath the unruffled waves—palaces for the Naiads of the placid waters. Towns and villages lay scattered at the foot of Jura, which, with dark ravine, and black promontories, stretched its roots into the watery expanse beneath. Carried away by wonder, I forgot the death of man, and the living and beloved friend near me. When I turned, I saw tears streaming from his eyes; his thin hands pressed one against the other, his animated countenance beaming with admiration; 'Why,' cried he, at last, 'Why, oh heart, whisperest thou of grief to me? Drink in the beauty of that scene, and possess delight beyond what a fabled paradise could afford'. (*LM*, 305)

This Alpine landscape recurs in Romantic writing, in the work of Radcliffe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, P. B. Shelley, and Mary Shelley herself. It is a landscape closely associated with the Romantic sublime as we find it in *Frankenstein*. In the writings of P. B. Shelley, it usually functions to offer a guarantee of the possibilities of human imagination. Here it is used to very different effect, to show how nature is beautiful yet indifferent. It will continue to exist when all humanity has disappeared and it will remain just as beautiful or even sublime without men to behold its beauty. As Sophie Thomas puts it, sublime

grandeur reflects and is paired with a sense of desolation in this particular scene,¹⁰³ a desolation that is far removed from Romantic admiration of nature. It becomes the appropriate landscape in which Adrian recognizes that there is no longer any reason at all to retain any hope. Even before this, Adrian's faith had been precarious: "As to the likelihood of escaping," said Adrian, "ten years from hence the cold stars may shine on the graves of all of us" (*LM*, 185). But still Adrian continues to do his duty until the very last, when the plague finally seems to have become dormant, when he ironically drowns in a storm: 'Something more was in his heart, to which he dared not give words. He felt that the end of time was come; he knew that one by one we should dwindle into nothingness.' (*LM*, 237) Despite this knowledge, Adrian's sense of duty makes him go on and lead his people to a supposedly safe place, 'there to die, one by one, till the LAST MAN should remain in a voiceless, empty world' (*LM*, 240). He believes 'it to be [his] destiny to guide and rule the last of the race of man, till death extinguish [his] government; and to this destiny [he] submit[s]' (*LM*, 289). Adrian represents something like a human ideal, and yet we should also bear in mind Ann Mellor's qualification: 'But even as Mary Shelley paints Adrian as a paragon of benevolence, idealism, courage, and self-sacrifice, her resentment cracks this perfect façade. Adrian never marries, never accepts responsibility for a family.'¹⁰⁴

In contrast to Adrian, Lionel begins life as a solitary shepherd: 'there was freedom in it, a companionship with nature, and a reckless loneliness; but these, romantic as they were, did not accord with the love of action and desire of human sympathy, characteristic of youth' (*LM*, 8). It is out of a 'desire of human sympathy' that he becomes a public figure – if only in his small Cumberland neighbourhood. He assumes the leadership of a gang of youths, winning their respect by suffering punishment for their deeds. This is a good indication of the character of Lionel's whole life. He says of himself: 'My fortunes have

¹⁰³ Sophie Thomas, 'The Ends of the Fragment, the Problem of the Preface: Proliferation and Finality in *The Last Man*', 'Introduction' in *Mary Shelley's Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle Sinatra (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 22-38, 28.

¹⁰⁴ Mellor, 'Love Guilt and Reparation', 149.

been, from the beginning, an exemplification of the power that mutability may possess over the varied tenor of man's life' (*LM*, 5). As soon as Adrian enters his life, it changes. He learns to read and write and appreciate literature and philosophy: 'Poetry and its creations, philosophy and its researches and classifications, alike awoke the sleeping ideas in my mind, and gave me new ones' (*LM*, 21). Yet, like Adrian, he does not feel obliged to put these ideas into practice. Apart from a short stay in Vienna, where he trains to become a secretary, he prefers to live an enclosed domestic life with his sister, friends and lover. He defines himself by means of his connections to others, and as has often been noted is the most passive of the principal characters. In this he remains closely modelled on Mary Shelley herself who even in the preface to *Frankenstein* claims that she was rather a passive beholder than an active participant in the discussions between Byron and her husband. This is probably only partly true, since Byron's high regard for her intellect would hardly have sprung from her listening to their talks but it surely helped her create the Shelley-myth that continues to control the manner in which many modern readers understand the poet, a myth that clearly had its origin in Mary Shelley's strong desire to make her husband appreciated if not by contemporaries, then at least by posterity.

When Adrian asks Lionel for his assistance, he agrees. Just as when he was a boy he earned the respect of others by sacrificing himself on their behalf, he sustains his adult identity by sacrificing himself for Adrian. Lionel's account of himself clearly shows that he defines himself through others:

I was an outcast and vagabond, when Adrian gently threw over me a silver net of love and civilization, and linked me inextricably to human charities and human excellence. I was one, who, though an aspirant after good, and an ardent lover of wisdom, was yet unenrolled in any list of worth, when Idris, the princely born, who was herself the personification of all that was divine in woman, she who walked the earth like a poet's dream, as a carved goddess endued with sense, or pictured saint stepping from the canvas – she, the most worthy, chose me, and gave me herself—a priceless gift. (*LM*, 189)

This also hints at how much he values his wife (and by extension his family) and prefers a private life to one in the public eye. Yet he had once seemed full of energy and ambition: ‘Life is before me, and I rush into possession. Hope, glory, love and blameless ambition are my guides, and my soul knows no dread’ (*LM*, 25). In the event he prefers to remain in the safe haven of his own family. He becomes a spectator of his friends’ lives rather than a participant in a life of his own. An active life is not what he is looking for:

To me [books] stood in place of an active career, of ambition, and those palpable excitements necessary to the multitude. The collation of philosophical opinions, the study of historical facts, the acquirements of languages, were at once my recreation and the serious aim of my life. I turned author myself. My productions however were sufficiently unpretending: they were confined to the biography of favourite historical characters, especially those whom I believed to have been traduced, or about whom clung obscurity and doubt. (*LM*, 112/13)

In this, Lionel again is not unlike Mary Shelley, who herself favoured writing about doubtful personages. A good example of a biographical essay in which Mary Shelley tries to give an author a more positive voice is her *Life of Voltaire*.¹⁰⁵ The editor of Volume Three of *Mary Shelley’s Literary Lives and Other Writings* claims of ‘Voltaire’ that in it Shelley ‘was able to write a deeply considered portrait, which directly confronted the prejudices habitually surrounding a man most of her readers would have considered dangerously subversive to established religion.’¹⁰⁶ In the beginning of her essay Shelley sums up all the faults and wrongs Voltaire was blamed for. She suggests that ‘[i]t is easy to make his life a diatribe against the wickedness and folly of such principles and intentions- to intersperse the pages that compose his history with various epithets of condemnation of a man so lost to the knowledge of truth.’ (V, 241)

Then she continues:

¹⁰⁵ Mary Shelley, ‘Voltaire’, in *Mary Shelley’s Literary Lives and other Writings*, Vol. 3, ed Clarissa Campbell Orr (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), pp. 241-319. Quoted in the text as V.

¹⁰⁶ *Mary Shelley’s Literary Lives and other Writings*, xviii.

But we do not intend to do this. We consider that Voltaire had many excuses, and he had also his uses. We do not mean, on the other hand, to write an elaborate defence of a system that cannot be defended, but we will mention the heads of those topics which we consider available for his justification to a certain limited extent. (V, 241)

So, unlike many of her contemporaries, she does not condemn Voltaire out of hand but she is at least willing to give him a fair chance. She does not try to vindicate him as she had done with her husband and Byron in *The Last Man*, yet she is unwilling to condemn him completely. She still allows him a certain value. Shelley does not condemn Voltaire's character or the ideas behind his actions and writings. She claims that he has a 'benevolent heart' (V, 242) and that his motives were pure (V, 243) which again makes him a figure that is remarkably reminiscent of her husband and as such deserves her full attention. She remains critical of his writings, arguing that he certainly was no poet, as he lacked a notion of imagery and he had no sense of the sublime (V, 245). Still, she insists that he was a serious philosopher, a 'premature genius' (V, 244) and that 'liberty of thought was in his eyes a blessing superior to every other'. This liberty, however, was far from granted in France in Voltaire's time with strict censorship in place and Voltaire himself suffered imprisonment in the Bastille for his and other people's writings that were believed to be his more than once. Shelley agrees that this freedom is something worth fighting for. She also defends him against the claims of his opponents that he was a zealot in his opposition to Christianity, concluding that he was only raging against the machinations of the catholic priesthood. In the end, however, Mary Shelley agrees, that Voltaire 'went too far' (V, 242). Yet, instead of focusing on all his negative characteristics, Mary Shelley points out that despite all '[h]e was charitable and benevolent; and though in his letters we find allusions to his donations, this is never done ostentatiously, but with the plain speech of a man, who, having fabricated his own fortune, knows the value of money, and keeps strict account of his expenditures' (V, 254). For Shelley, herself always struggling for financial security, this alone is cause for admiration. In this representation Mary Shelley almost seems to

forget that, unlike her husband, whose writings (except for *The Mask of Anarchy*, which, however, was never published during his lifetime) were too abstract to constitute a serious political threat, Voltaire's writings were indeed threatening for monarchs, Christians and established social standards.

Lionel, in the novel is unknowingly preparing for his great task, which will be to write the biography of his friends and family which will incorporate by extension the history of all mankind. As McWhir puts it, 'Lionel writes the life he has known, which is both his own life and the history of the world'.¹⁰⁷ He remains himself peripheral to the story that he tells, in a manner that, as Lisa Hopkins observes, reflects exactly Mary Shelley's own habit of self-denial: 'The narrator [...] Lionel Verney, whose situation as the sole, and in his own eyes, the least interesting survivor of a group of brilliant and heroic friends exactly paralleled Mary Shelley's own'.¹⁰⁸ Mary Shelley herself, like Lionel, later wrote short biographies of French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese writers for Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* and like Lionel, as I have shown, she often chooses figures who are obscure or have been traduced. More to the point, *The Last Man* might itself be understood as the corrective biography of her late husband that she was refused permission to write by her father-in-law, Sir Timothy Shelley. It is a novel in which she tries to correct the established public view of her late husband.

She also tried to correct the public understanding of others, not quite as close to her, but whom she still held in great esteem. Byron is quite clearly represented in the novel by Lord Raymond, an ambitious, scheming war-hero, who finally falls victim to the love from which he boasts that he is immune. Like Adrian, Raymond is a humanitarian and an idealist, but, unlike him he is personally ambitious: his devotion to others is never quite independent of his fierce self-regard. He finally dies, like Byron, fighting for the Greeks in

¹⁰⁷ McWhir, "Unconceiving Marble": Anatomy and Animation in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*' *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, ed. Helen M. Buss, D. L. Macdonald, Anne McWhir (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001), 172.

¹⁰⁸ Lisa Hopkins, 'The Last Man and the Language of the Heart', *Romanticism on the Net: An Electronic Journal Devoted to Romantic Studies*, Vol.22, 2001 May, no pagination, 1 (on printout).

their war of independence against the Turks, but Mary Shelley allows him a more heroic end than the real-life Byron found in Missolonghi. Mary Shelley's Byron, unlike her Shelley, remains a deeply conflicted person, but he is clearly distinguished from the rakish, self-indulgent Byron of the popular imagination. Instead, she depicts him as a man torn between his desire for domestic happiness and his ambition to hold sway over nations.

Like Adrian and Raymond before him, Lionel from a strong sense of duty writes down his story and the story of his friends and family, which becomes, in effect, the story of all humanity. His principal obligation is to the truth. He wants posterity- if there should be a posterity- to know exactly what happened:

Kings have been called the fathers of their people. Suddenly I became as it were the father of all mankind. Posterity became my heirs. My thoughts were gems to enrich the treasure house of man's intellectual possessions; each sentiment was a precious gift I bestowed on them. (*LM*, 113)

He becomes at this moment a prototype of all Romantic writers, who, as Andrew Bennett has argued, were distinguished by their failure to find a readership amongst their contemporaries, so that they had no recourse but to address themselves to posterity.¹⁰⁹ Lionel conceives himself as the guardian of human memory, much as Mary Shelley feels herself the guardian of her husband's.

It has often been argued that Mary Shelley was critical of the bourgeois family as an institution.¹¹⁰ Yet Lionel, who is the character closest to herself, often regarded as her alter ego, is happiest when surrounded by his family. He is also the most feminine of the male characters. Care for his loved ones matters most to him from very early in his life, when he falls in love with Idris, Adrian's sister, and rather than seeking his living in the city, he prefers to remain at Windsor:

¹⁰⁹ See Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Writers and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹¹⁰ See for example Audrey A. Fisch, 'AIDS, Deconstruction, and *The Last Man*', in *The Other Mary Shelley*, ed. Fisch, Mellor, Schor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 267.

And yet I dared not request him to use his influence that I might obtain an honourable provision for myself—for then I should have been obliged to leave Windsor. I hovered forever around the walls of its Castle, beneath its enshadowing thickets; my sole companions were my books and my loving thoughts. [...] and I watched the movements of the lady of my heart (*LM*, 55).

Mary Shelley shows that for Lionel, as for herself, family and private circles are more important than public renown, glory, and fame. Lionel is happy when he is close to those he loves and even happier when he can contribute to their happiness or at least ease their pain. This is why he later wants to protect Adrian from the duties of the Lord Protectorship and also why he never voluntarily leaves his family: ‘The separation from my Idris was painful—but necessity reconciled us to it in some degree: necessity and the hope of saving Raymond, and restoring him again to happiness and Perdita’ (*LM*, 118). Here he leaves one part of the family behind but only to assist another.

Perdita much resembles him in this respect. Yet there is a slight difference between them. Lionel extends his care to all members of his family, Perdita exclusively focuses on Raymond:

She was not sanguine, but secure; and the expectation of seeing the lover she had banished, the husband, friend, heart’s companion from whom she had long been alienated, wrapt her senses in delight, her mind in placidity. It was beginning life again; it was leaving barren sands for an abode of fertile beauty; it was a harbour after a tempest, an opiate after sleepless nights, a happy waking from a terrible dream (*LM*, 121).

Her attitude to Raymond is summed up perfectly when she says ‘I gave him love only. I devoted myself to him: imperfect creature that I was, I took myself to task, that I might become worthy of him’ (*LM*, 103). When Raymond is in captivity she even ‘abstained from food; she lay on the bare earth, and, by such mimicry of his enforced torments, endeavoured to hold communion with his distant pain’ (*LM*, 122). Perdita wants not only to contribute to his happiness, she also wants physically to share his pain. This is an extreme kind of love in which ‘the object of her life was to do him pleasure’ (*LM*, 127)

and has extreme results when their marriage fails. Then, Perdita voices what Mary Shelley seems to have identified as the predicament of her whole sex:

He, she thought, can be great and happy without me. Would that I also had a career! Would that I could freight some untried bark with all my hopes, energies, and desires, and launch it forth into the ocean of life—bound for some attainable point, with ambition or pleasure at the helm! But adverse winds detain me on shore; like Ulysses; I sit at the water's edge and weep. (*LM*, 117)

This is one of the very few passages in which Mary Shelley argues along the lines of her feminist mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. She voices a frustration at the manner in which women are confined within the narrow boundaries of family life, and the passage also seems to look askance, as Audrey Fisch argues, at the Romantic cult of male leadership: ‘Thus Mary Shelley, through her women characters, suggests in a critique of the perfect ship of state and the thematization of that body politic as self-sufficient and complete through its projection onto the body of the male leader’.¹¹¹ Fisch argues that ‘Mary Shelley’s innovative critique lies in her insistence that these political leaders, and their systems, are flawed in their emphasis on the idealization of the male leader and their glorification of imperial England, separate and safe’.¹¹² The first part of this statement is best exemplified by Lord Raymond, but all three male main characters at least for a while are attracted by the cult of leadership.

The intensity of Perdita’s love for one person, Raymond, is equalled by Evadne’s love for the same person. For him she designs a National Gallery that will perpetuate his name rather than her own. Later she even joins his army in Greece to support his cause and the cause of her country:

Then again she sadly lamented her hard fate; that a woman, with a woman’s heart and sensibility, should be driven by hopeless love and vacant hopes to take up the trade of arms, and suffer beyond the endurance of man privation, labour, and pain (*LM*, 131).

¹¹¹ Fisch, ‘AIDS, Deconstruction, and *The Last Man*’, 275/76.

¹¹² Fisch, ‘AIDS, Deconstruction, and *The Last Man*’, 273.

The difference between the two women is that Evadne pursues an active career. Yet both women are equally unsuccessful in maintaining their relationship with Raymond. Evadne, a ‘monument of human passion and misery’ (*LM*, 132), curses him when she is dying, whereas Perdita is united with him only in death.

Instead of allowing Perdita to remain in Greece close to Raymond’s grave, Lionel thinks it is best for her to return to the family and Windsor. In this, he respects Raymond’s wishes, yet he ignores Perdita’s. He drugs her and brings her aboard a ship bound for England, and Perdita, when she awakens, kills herself. He claims:

I believe that most people in my situation would have acted in the same manner. Yet this consideration does not, or rather did not in after time, diminish the reproaches of my conscience. At the moment, I felt convinced that I was acting for the best, and that all I did was right and even necessary. (*LM*, 154)

It is an incident that seems designed to expose once again the male assumption that men know best what is good for women:

To these pangs were added the loss of Perdita, lost through my own accursed self-will and conceit. This dear one, my sole relation; whose progress I had marked from tender childhood through the varied path of life, and seen her throughout conspicuous for integrity, devotion, and true affection; for all that constitutes the peculiar graces of the female character, and beheld her at last the victim of too much loving, too constant an attachment to the perishable and lost, she, in her pride of beauty and life, had thrown aside the pleasant perception of the apparent world for the unreality of the grave, and had left poor Clara quite an orphan. (*LM*, 156/57)

Idris, like Lionel, cannot bear to be absent from her family and is wholly absorbed by care for her husband and children:

Before this event, the little beings, sprung from herself, the young heirs of her transient life, seemed to have a sure lease of existence; now she dreaded that the pitiless destroyer might snatch her remaining darlings, as it had snatched their brother. The least illness caused throes of terror; she was miserable if she were at all absent from them. (*LM*, 163/64)

Lionel's feelings too are centred on his immediate family, his own children and wife: 'no labour too great, no scheme too wild, if it promised life to them. 'O! ye heart-strings of mine, could ye be torn asunder, and my soul not spend itself in tears of blood for sorrow!' (*LM*, 180) He even forbids his wife from nursing the sick for fear that she also might become infected:

Maternal affection had not rendered Idris selfish; at the beginning of our calamity she had, with thoughtless enthusiasm, devoted herself to the care of the sick and helpless. I checked her; and she submitted to my rule. I told her how the fear of her danger palsied my exertions, how the knowledge of her safety strung my nerves to endurance. I shewed her the dangers which her children incurred during her absence; and she at length agreed not to go beyond the inclosure of the forest. (*LM*, 199)

So Lionel is not only a caring husband but also a strict *pater familias* who may himself help others but does not want other members of his family to be put in the same danger. Jane Aaron remarks that in such passages the polarisation of gender roles remains intact. As a direct result, Idris is consumed from within as she is not allowed to use her energies to fight their common foe.¹¹³ Unlike Adrian, Lionel puts his family first and the rest of mankind second:

Above all I must guard those entrusted by nature and fate to my especial care. And surely, if among all my fellow-creatures I were to select those who might stand forth examples of greatness and goodness of man, I could choose no other than those allied to me by the most sacred ties. Some from among the family of man must survive, and these should be among the survivors; that should be my task – to accomplish it my own life were a small sacrifice. (*LM*, 189)

Despite this, Lionel is aware that all his efforts are futile: 'We should never see our children ripen into maturity, nor behold their downy cheeks roughen, their blithe hearts subdued by passion or care; but we had them now—they lived and we lived – what more could we desire?' (*LM*, 198) Does Lionel retain any hope for humanity? Lionel himself

¹¹³ Jane Aaron, 'The Return of the Repressed: Reading Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*', in *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Sellers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 9-21.18.

always seems to waver between hopefulness and hopelessness. That he continues with his efforts, writes his report and sets out to travel the world, when everybody else has died, suggests that he still hopes. Yet his narrative is, almost from the first, weighted by an awareness of how the story will end: ‘Not one of you, O! fated crowd, can escape – not one! not my own ones! Not my Idris and her babes! Horror and misery!’ (*LM*, 174). And yet, only few pages later he tries to convince himself and others that ‘we will not despair’ (*LM*, 178). He tries to encourage hope and optimism where he himself feels desolate: ‘I followed her, and strove to inspire more hope than I could myself entertain’ (*LM*, 210). He deceives others and most importantly he deceives himself. Yet without hope there would be no point in his continued efforts: ‘Yet we were not all to die. No truly, though thinned, the race of man would continue, and the great plague would, in after years, become matter of history and wonder’ (*LM*, 188/89). But these moments of hope alternate with fearful premonitions: ‘Great God! would it one day be thus? One day all extinct, save myself, should I walk the earth alone? Were these warning voices, whose inarticulate and oracular sense forced belief upon me?’ (*LM*, 192) Of course, the closer the end of the novel approaches the less reason Lionel has to sustain his hopefulness. Even nature seems to have turned against mankind:

It was no consolation, that with the first winds of March the lanes were filled with violets, the fruit trees covered with blossoms, that the corn sprung up, and the leaves came out, forced by the unseasonable heat. We feared the balmy air—we feared the cloudless sky, the flower-covered earth, and delightful woods, for we looked on the fabric of the universe no longer as our dwelling, but our tomb, and the fragrant land smelled to the apprehension of fear like a wide church-yard. (*LM*, 194/95)

His efforts to preserve hope become increasingly desperate: “‘We will save them, Idris,’” I said, “‘I will save them. Years from hence we shall recount them our fears, then passed away with their occasion’” (*LM*, 200). At the last he is unable to console himself with such fictions:

The last blessing of humanity was wrested from us; we might no longer hope. Can the madman, as he clanks his chains 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 arm bears the axe, hope? Can the ship-wrecked mariner, who spent with swimming, hears close behind the splashing waters divided by a shark which pursues him through the Atlantic, hope? Such hope as theirs, we also may entertain! (*LM*, 226)

In the face of the plague, religious consolation is exposed as entirely hollow:

Once man was a favourite of the Creator, as the royal psalmist sang, ‘God had made him a little lower than the angels, and had crowned him with glory and honour. God made him to have dominion over the works of his hands, and put all things under his feet.’ 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. (*LM*, 229/30)

Despite all this, Lionel continues to struggle to preserve his family: ‘I would not yield, but to the last gasp resolutely defend my dear ones against sorrow and pain’ (*LM*, 233). Like Adrian he realizes that ‘[n]ow each life was a gem, each human breathing form of far, O! far more worth than subtlest imagery of sculpted stone’ (*LM*, 233). Even when he is finally humanity’s sole survivor, he ‘was not yet persuaded of my loss; I did not yet feel in every pulsation, in every nerve, in every thought, that I remained alone of my race, —that I was the LAST MAN’ (*LM*, 324). He

had hoped in the very heart of despair, so that every new impression of the hard-cut reality on my soul brought with it a fresh pang, telling me the yet unstudied lesson, that neither change of place nor time could bring alleviation to my misery, but that, as I now was, I must continue, day after day, month after month, year after year, while I lived. (*LM*, 330)

In the end he sets out to travel the world and claims that ‘[n]either hope nor joy are my pilots—restless despair and fierce desire of change lead me on’ (*LM*, 342). It is a narrative sequence in which Mary Shelley tests to the breaking point her husband’s insistence that it

is possible to ‘hope till hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates’.¹¹⁴

Anne McWhir makes an interesting suggestion:

While some of Lionel Verney’s qualities suggest Shelleyan idealism, MWS’s use of the name Verney, borrowed from a well-known seventeenth-century family, may emphasize her novel’s political scepticism: like Sir Ralph Verney, who refused to take sides in the Civil War, Lionel Verney avoids commitment to a particular political cause.¹¹⁵

Lionel does not commit himself to any political cause, nor does he believe in human perfectibility, although he tries to support Adrian wherever he can, but this is for personal reasons rather than from any philosophical belief.

In the end Lionel turns author and dutifully and truthfully describes for posterity or the dead what has happened to mankind. Throughout the novel there are addresses to the reader, direct or indirect, in which he refers to this task and the pain it gives him. For example, ‘Alas! why must I record the hapless delusion of this matchless specimen of humanity? What is there in our nature that is forever urging us on towards pain and misery?’ (*LM*, 23) or,

Oh my pen! haste thou to write what was, before the thought of what is, arrests the hand that guides thee. If I lift up my eyes and see the desert earth, and feel that those dear eyes have spent their mortal lustre, and that those beauteous lips are silent, their “crimson leaves” faded, for ever I am mute!’ (*LM*, 57)

Lionel, of course, writes from a position of complete knowledge. He knows the outcome of his report long before he reaches its end. But, like Adrian, he has knowledge without power. The only power he possesses is to write down what happened and to preserve his knowledge in writing. Yet his writing does not change anything: he remains a solitary being, the only inhabitant of the earth, and yet it offers him the last vestige of hope and he clings to it. Through his writing ‘[s]uddenly I became as it were the father of all mankind.

¹¹⁴ *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 573-4.

¹¹⁵ Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. Anne McWhir (Ontario; London: Broadview Press, 1996), 19n.

Posterity became my heirs. My thoughts were gems to enrich the treasure house of man's intellectual possessions' (*LM*, 113). But all such ambition is coloured by irony, because, as he finally realises, 'posterity is no more; fame, and ambition, and love, are words void of meaning' (*LM*, 234). His writing perhaps has a value only as an anodyne, as an activity that relieves his own pain, which may equally be a value that Mary Shelley found in writing her novel:

After a long interval, I am again impelled by the restless spirit within me to continue my narration; but I must alter the mode which I have hitherto adopted. The details contained in the foregoing pages, apparently trivial, yet each slightest one weighing like lead in the depressed scale of human afflictions; this tedious dwelling on the sorrows of others, while my own were only in apprehension, this slowly laying bare of my soul's wounds: this journal of death; this long drawn and tortuous path, leading to the ocean of countless tears, awakens me again to keen grief. I had used this history as an opiate; while it described my beloved friends, fresh with life and glowing with hope, active assistants of the scene, I was soothed; there will be a more melancholy pleasure in painting the end of all'. (*LM*, 192)

At one point he wonders if he will be able to finish his task:

'Now -- soft awhile -- have I arrived so near the end? Yes! it is all over now.—a step or two over those new made graves, and the wearisome way is done. Can I accomplish my task? Can I streak my paper with words capacious of the grand conclusion? Arise, black Melancholy! quit thy Cimmerian solitude! Bring with thee murky fogs from hell, which may drink up the day; bring blight and pestiferous exhalations, which entering the hollow caverns and breathing places of earth, may fill her stony veins with corruption, so that not only herbage may no longer flourish, the trees may rot and the rivers run with gall—(*LM*, 318).

He compares himself to Robinson Crusoe, except that Crusoe's island has become the whole world:

I was rich in the so called goods of life. If I turned my steps from the near barren scene, and entered any of the earth's million cities, I should find their wealth stored up for my accommodation—clothes, food, books, and a choice of dwelling beyond the command of the princes of former times – every climate was subject to my selection, while he [Robinson Crusoe] was obliged to toil in the acquirement of every necessary, and was the inhabitant of a tropical island against whose heats and storms he could obtain small shelter. (*LM*, 326)

Although Lionel, unlike Crusoe has material wealth and luxuries, these things are pointless. Crusoe ‘was far happier than I: for he could hope, nor hope in vain—the destined vessel at last arrived, to bear him to countrymen and kindred, where the events of his solitude became a fire-side tale. To none could I ever relate the story of my adversity; no hope had I’ (*LM*, 326).

In the end, Lionel sets out to explore the world, becoming a kind of eternal wanderer, yet this does not mean that he entertains new hope of finding other survivors: ‘I form no expectation of alteration for the better; but the monotonous present is intolerable to me’ (*LM*, 342). Or to use Haggarty’s phrase: ‘If Lionel’s wanderings take the outward form of a Romantic quest, he nevertheless suffers from an emptiness within: once again a fundamental lack makes any myth of growth seem woefully inadequate.’¹¹⁶

One of the key minor figures in the novel is the astronomer Merrival who is convinced that ‘[t]he pole of the earth will coincide with the pole of the ecliptic,’ “an universal spring will be produced, and earth become a paradise.” [...] ‘in an hundred thousand years’ (*LM*, 159). Merrival is characterized as someone who does not notice the world around himself falling apart:

This poor man, learned as La Place, guileless and unforeseeing 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 walls 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, and the excess of calamity was merely to him as the occurrence of a cloudy night, when he would have given his right hand to observe a celestial phenomenon. (*LM*, 209)

This caricature of a philosopher and astronomer is unnervingly close to a caricature of Mary Shelley’s own father and husband. P. B. Shelley himself supported his

¹¹⁶ George E. Haggarty, “‘The End of History’: Identity and Dissolution in Apocalyptic Gothic’, *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, Vol. 41 No.3, Fall 2000, 240.

perfectibilian ideas by the supposition that the earth's poles might be realigned. Merrival is a man who blinds himself to the present by focusing his attention on 'the state of mankind six thousand years hence' (*LM*, 210):

This old man, tottering on the edge of the grave, and prolonging his prospect through millions of calculated years, -- this visionary who had not seen starvation in the wasted forms of his wife and children, or plague in the horrible sights and sounds that surrounded him—this astronomer apparently dead on earth, and lining only in the motion of the spheres – loved his family with unapparent but intense affection. Through long habit they had become part of himself; his want of worldly knowledge, his absence of mind and infant guilelessness, made him utterly dependent on them. (*LM*, 220)

It would be wrong to offer this description as a direct satirical attack on either Godwin or Shelley, but it does seem to pour mockery on the kind of millennial vision that they were ready to entertain: 'The idea of a Millennium does surface repeatedly in *The Last Man*, but it always turns out to be a will-o-the-wisp. This is nowhere as evident as in the speculations of the astronomer Merrival whose views seem ironically compounded of the most perfectibilian aspects of William Godwin's and Percy Bysshe Shelley's.'¹¹⁷ *The Last Man* is a fiction designed to correct the false public impression of her husband, but it may also be a novel designed to expose as baseless the political optimism that her husband struggled throughout his life to maintain.

2.3. The Plague in *The Last Man*

The plague in *The Last Man* has been read and interpreted as meaning, signifying or representing many things. Jennifer Wagner-Lawler and Audrey Fisch read it, like death, as a leveller 'that ma[kes] any form of social self-fashioning among the survivors a ridiculous pretense:' for them the plague becomes 'civilisation's final, tyrannical ruler'.¹¹⁸ Victoria

¹¹⁷ Paley, 'Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*: Apocalypse without Millennium', 115/16.

¹¹⁸ Wagner-Lawler, 'Performing History, Performing Humanity in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*', 7 and 9(on printout). See also: Fisch, 'AIDS, Deconstruction, and *The Last Man*, 272.

Middleton on the other hand reads it as simply representing death, of which neither Lionel Verney, the narrator, nor Mary Shelley can make any sense.¹¹⁹ Anne McWhir examines the novel in the light of contemporary medical knowledge and finds that Mary Shelley follows anti-contagionist theories which claim that the disease is not transmitted by touch or infection but that the source of the disease is to be found in a quality of the air itself. But she also reads the plague metaphorically as representing ‘any system, idea, or influence considered morally or intellectually dangerous’.¹²⁰ Charlotte Sussman suggests that the plague functions as ‘a way to trigger and consider the movement of vast numbers of people’ since the plague forces people to leave their countries. She goes on to claim that Mary Shelley uses the plague as a metaphor to express her disapproval of the emigration policies of the early 19th century.¹²¹ Closely connected with this issue of mobility and emigration, others, for example Julia Wright, interpret the disease in the context of contemporary imperialistic politics and the development of an international trade that on the one hand enriched the English nation but on the other made England vulnerable to contamination by the foreign:¹²² ‘The end of civilization, that is, results from imperial desires, racist cultural encounters, and a refusal to check the forces of emerging capitalism.’¹²³ In a rather similar argument Lokke identifies the plague with Raymond’s campaign of conquest and regards the disease as result of unchecked colonialism.¹²⁴ Joseph Lew also reads the disease as punishment for the hubris that Raymond displays when he enters Constantinople in defiance of all warnings.¹²⁵ In addition, he offers it as a more general metaphor for corruption.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Middleton, ‘Exile, Isolation, and Accommodation in *The Last Man*’, 174.

¹²⁰ Anne McWhir, ‘Mary Shelley’s Anti-Contagionism: *The Last Man* as “Fatal Narrative”’, *Mosaic*, Vol. 35 No. 2, 2002 June, 23-38. No pagination in online source, 2 (on printout).

¹²¹ Charlotte Sussman, “‘Islanded in the World’: Cultural and Human Mobility in *The Last Man*”, *PMLA*, Vol. 118 No. 2, 2003 March, 287,294.

¹²² Julia M. Wright, ‘Anxieties of Space in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, in *Mary Shelley’s Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), 140.

¹²³ Haggarty, “‘The End of History’: Identity and Dissolution in Apocalyptic Gothic’, 239.

¹²⁴ Lokke, ‘*The Last Man*’, 124.

¹²⁵ Lew, ‘The Plague of Imperial Desire’, 262.

Morton D. Paley believes that the plague simply functions as a device that disrupts all order in the world.¹²⁷ Michael Eberle-Sinatra offers a psychological reading in which the plague becomes a female reaction to repression and domination by men: ‘The plague stresses this repression [of women] by the very fact that it is gendered as female in *The Last Man*, and functions both metaphorically and literally against the male domination present in the novel.’¹²⁸ Jane Aaron also incorporates the plague into her reading of the novel’s gender politics: ‘The Plague in *The Last Man* appears to symbolise the eruption of pent-up female discontents, no longer affecting only the interior psychological balance of the individual, but exteriorised, on a vast scale, to threaten the continuity of the human race as a whole.’¹²⁹ Some interpret it as racially charged and connected with the East and the ‘black man’.¹³⁰ Others read it as an ‘apocalyptic response to the horrors of the French Revolution’.¹³¹ Kevin Hutchings interprets it as rendering ‘entirely vain all human efforts to generate positive historical change’: it is ‘neither an instrument of providence nor an object of human control: it is, rather, ultimately inscrutable and entirely ungovernable’.¹³² For Mary Lowe-Evans, it is a novel that ‘puts Godwin’s *Political Justice* in connection with Shelleyan metaphysics, ultimately concluding that all moral and political concepts lose their meaning in the face of implacable universal death’.¹³³ But Samantha Webb warns against too easy an assumption that the plague is Mary Shelley’s ultimate critique of a revolutionary Romanticism. Such

¹²⁶ Lew, ‘The Plague of Imperial Desire’, 276.

¹²⁷ Paley, ‘Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*: Apocalypse without Millennium’, 118.

¹²⁸ Michel Eberle-Sinatra, ‘Gender, Authorship and Male Domination: Mary Shelley’s Limited Freedom in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*’, in *Mary Shelley’s Fictions: From *Frankenstein* to *Falkner**, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), 102.

¹²⁹ Aaron, ‘The Return of the Repressed: Reading Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, 17, 18.

¹³⁰ Haggarty, ‘“The End of History”: Identity and Dissolution in Apocalyptic Gothic’, 238.

¹³¹ Lokke, ‘*The Last Man*’, 116.

¹³² Hutchings, ‘“A Dark Image in a Phantasmagoria”’, 236, 239.

¹³³ Mary Lowe-Evans, ‘Introduction’, in *Critical Essays on Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (New York: G.K. Hall; London: Prentice Hall International, 1998), pp.1-21, 16.

readings, she claims, ‘conflate[s] the *effects* of the plague – the return to England of repressed cultures, the levelling of class structures, the erection of false prophets, anarchy – with its *causes*, which remain mysterious and unexplained in the novel.’¹³⁴

Plague metaphors were, it is true, integral to the political discourse of the period. Burke, for example, writes of the French revolution, ‘[i]f it be a plague: it is such a plague, that the precautions of the most severe quarantine ought to be established against it’.¹³⁵ It is perhaps in reaction against Burke, and in accord with his father-in-law, Godwin, that P. B. Shelley suggests that a benign sense might be attached to the notion of contagion, in which it signified the process by which just principles, if communicated by one person to a few, might in the course of time be disseminated throughout the world. In *Prometheus Unbound* it is those like Shelley himself, ‘lonely men’ inspired by ‘truth, virtue, love, genius, or joy’ who find a ‘voice which is contagion to the world’. (*Prometheus Unbound*, III, ii, 5-10), and in *The Triumph of Life* it is ‘the great bards of old’ whose ‘living melody / Tempers its contagion / To the vein of those who are infected with it’ (*The Triumph of Life*, 276-8). In the novel Adrian seems to draw his metaphors from Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’ when he says:

For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows of death, soothing the bed of disease, and wiping away the tears of agony. And what is each human being worth, if he do not put forth his strength to aid his fellow-creatures? My soul is a fading spark, my nature frail as a spent wave; but I dedicate all of intellect and strength that remains to me, to that one work, and take upon me the task, as far as I am able, of bestowing blessings on my fellow-men!’ (*LM*, 54)

¹³⁴ Samantha Webb, ‘Reading the End of the World: *The Last Man*, History, and the Agency of Romantic Authorship’, in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, Stuart Curran (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 127.

¹³⁵ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event*, ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, reprinted 1983), 140.

As Victoria Middleton suggests, ‘Through Verney’s career, Mary Shelley demonstrates her new belief that political solutions to the problem of human unhappiness are not ineffectual but rather meaningless, a more radically pessimistic view of the human social condition.’¹³⁶

While all these readings may contain some truth, I would like to interpret the plague more flexibly, reading it not only as a leveller that disorders the world but as a disease that de-signifies everything, as a phenomenon that un-creates biblical creation (or as an anti-birth myth). I thus agree with Sussman who refers to Lionel as an ‘anti-Adam’ who is not a powerful namer but a ‘passive witness to global un-naming’.¹³⁷ *Genesis* tells the story of how the whole of the human race descended from just one man; *The Last Man* seems to reverse this process, leaving the earth populated by only one man.¹³⁸ Even structurally this novel reverses the Bible, the latter beginning with the creation of man and ending with the Revelation whereas the former starts with a prophecy and ends with one man surviving an apocalyptic disease.¹³⁹ It takes God seven days to complete the Creation, and it takes the plague seven years to depopulate the world. In addition to adopting a counter-biblical narrative Mary Shelley also ‘explicitly denies religious interpretation of her plague:’ the advent of the disease shatters all ‘pastoral idylls’ and nature ‘remains indifferent to the preservation of human life’.¹⁴⁰

The plague in *The Last Man* is not to be read as God’s punishment of humanity but rather as a device that takes meaning away from all conceivable ideas, projects, relationships and institutions. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is confronted with an England that is going through a reformation: monarchy has been abolished and a democratic government has been installed instead with Ryland, a character who seems to be based on

¹³⁶ Middleton, ‘Exile, Isolation, and Accommodation in *The Last Man*’, 168.

¹³⁷ Sussman, “‘Islanded in the World’”: Cultural and Human Mobility in *The Last Man*’, 295.

¹³⁸ Young-Ok, “‘Read Your Fall’”: The Signs of Plague in *The Last Man*’, 3 (on printout).

¹³⁹ As opposed to: Giovanna Franci, ‘A Mirror in the Future: Vision and Apocalypse in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, *Mary Shelley*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), pp. 181-91, 186 who argues that *The Last Man*, like the Bible, begins in the beginning and ends with apocalypse.

¹⁴⁰ Mellor, ‘Love Guilt and Reparation’, 168.

William Cobbett but who shares some Shelleyan ideas, acting as its head of government with the title of Lord Protector.¹⁴¹ In one of his speeches he describes the present state of England as follows:

He described this republic; shewed how it gave privilege to each individual in the state, to rise to consequence, and even to temporary sovereignty. He compared the royal and republican spirit; shewed how the one tended to enslave the minds of men; while all the institutions of the other served to raise even the meanest among us to something great and good. He shewed how England had become powerful, and its inhabitants valiant and wise, by means of the freedom they enjoyed. (*LM*, 41/42)

Any form of political government however proves equally helpless in the face of an all-destroying plague. As Audrey Fisch suggests, the plague functions as a device that allows Shelley to treat ‘all political programs as if they were indistinguishable and hopeless.’ the distinctions between democracy, republicanism, monarchy, or theocracy are exposed as negligible in the face of the plague and universal death.¹⁴² Freedom itself becomes meaningless if one is not able to enjoy it.

Like many radicals of the period, like, most notably, Thomas Paine, and like the French revolutionaries Ryland is opposed to all hereditary distinctions:

The political state of England became agitated as the time drew near when the new Protector was to be elected. This event excited the more interest, since it was the current report, that if the popular candidate [Ryland] should be chosen, the question of the abolition of hereditary rank, and other feudal relics, would come under the consideration of parliament. Not a word had been spoken during the present session on any of these topics. Everything would depend upon the choice of a Protector, and the elections of the ensuing year. (*LM*, 160)

The abolition of rank becomes a pointless reform in the context of a disease that erases distinctions between people more radically than any political legislation could achieve. As Young-Ok observes, ‘hierarchies are disrupted and reversed, and any dividing markers

¹⁴¹ I am indebted to William A. Walling for the idea that not only Adrian but Ryland represents some Shelleyan ideas: William A. Walling, *Mary Shelley*, 89.

¹⁴² Fisch, ‘AIDS, Deconstruction, and *The Last Man*’, 273.

become meaningless.’ The plague turns into a ‘destroyer’ of all power, rank, and wealth.¹⁴³

2.4. Creativity and the Meaning of Art

At the beginning of *The Last Man* the ‘Author’s Introduction’ constructs a fiction of origins. The fictional author and a companion visit Naples in 1818 and make an expedition to the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl, as Mary and P. B. Shelley had done. In it they find an accumulation of leaves and bark and other material on which writing is inscribed in ancient and modern languages. After this first visit, ‘we often returned to this cave, sometimes alone, skimming the sunlit sea, and each time added to our store’ (*LM*, 3). The author deciphers and translates the leaves, fills in the gaps and in the end puts the whole story together. This, for the fictional author, is a therapeutic task, which helps him or her to get over some unstated personal tragedy:

My labours have cheered long hours of solitude, and taken me out of a world, which has averted its once benignant face from me, to one glowing with imagination and power. Will my readers ask how I could find solace from the narration of misery and woeful change? This is one of the mysteries of our nature, which holds full sway over me, and from whose influence I cannot escape. I confess, that I have not been unmoved by the development of the tale; and that I have been depressed, nay agonized, at some parts of the recital, which I have faithfully transcribed from my materials. Yet such is human nature, that the excitement of mind was dear to me, and that the imagination, painter of tempest and earthquake, or, worse, the stormy and ruin-fraught passions of man, softened my real sorrows and endless regrets, by clothing these fictitious ones in that ideality, which takes the mortal sting from pain. (*LM*, 4)

Here, then, a fictitious author puts together a narrative which also serves to distract from personal loss and pain. Her task seems at once and indistinguishably editorial and creative:

‘Sometimes I have thought, that, obscure and chaotic as they [the inscribed leaves that have been gathered] are, they owe their present form to me, their decipherer’ (*LM*, 4). The

¹⁴³ Young-Ok, “‘Read Your Fall’”: The Signs of Plague in *The Last Man*, 5.

idea of the scattered leaves also appears in one of the epigraphs Mary Shelley selected (and later discarded) for her edition of Percy Shelley's poems, a phrase from one of Petrarch's sonnets: 'Ma ricogliendo le sue sparte fronde/ Dietro lo [for le] vo [pur] così passo passo,'¹⁴⁴ which can be translated as 'gathering up the scattered leaves / step by step, like this, I follow him'. This is what Mary Shelley seems to do in *The Last Man*: step by step she follows the life and ideas of her husband to find – not unlike the fictitious author – consolation for her loss. Emily Sunstein claims that the 'leaves' for Mary Shelley correspond to Percy Shelley's 'works, deeds, and virtues'.¹⁴⁵ This reading would suggest that for Mary Shelley, as for her narrator, the writing of *The Last Man* was a therapeutic task, that allowed her not only to soothe her pain but also to work and experiment once more with her husband's ideas (she had been prevented by Shelley's father from publishing an edition of his works or from writing a biography of him). The work of deciphering, transcribing and arranging the 'scattered leaves' seems a surrogate for the work of editing her husband's writings, the task that her husband's death had imposed on her, and his father's injunction had prohibited.

At the end of the novel when Lionel explains how he came to compose his account of the events of which he is the sole survivor, Mary Shelley offers a second myth of origins. Lionel was already an author, but his earlier attempts had been 'confined to the biography of favourite historical characters, especially those whom [he] believed to have been traduced, or about whom clung obscurity and doubt' (*LM*, 113), writings, as already mentioned, intriguingly like those that Mary Shelley was to produce for Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. But it is only when he is left alone, sole survivor of the plague, that he finds the ambition to leave behind an account of all the people he loved. He is motivated by the idea that through his efforts, in the unlikely event that there should be a posterity, people will not forget about them. In this Lionel echoes the plight of many Romantic authors –

¹⁴⁴ Sunstein, *Mary Shelley*, 235.

¹⁴⁵ Sunstein, *Mary Shelley*, 235.

most importantly Percy Bysshe Shelley – who unable to find a living audience hoped for an audience in posterity.

Lionel writes for posterity for he still entertains the hope that somewhere, somehow survivors remain who will repopulate the Earth. But he dedicates his writings

TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD.
SHADOWS, ARISE, AND READ YOUR FALL!
BEHOLD THE HISTORY OF THE
LAST MAN (*LM*, 339)

Here, then, is a solitary being who uses creativity to distract himself from the fact that he is quite alone in the world. Or in his own words:

I will leave a monument of the existence of Verney, the Last Man. At first I thought only to speak of plague, of death, and last, of desertion; but I lingered fondly on my early years, and recorded with sacred zeal the virtues of my companions. They have been with me during the fulfilment of my task. I have brought it to an end – I lift my eyes from my paper – again they are lost to me. Again I feel that I am alone.
(*LM*, 339)

His narrative is janus-faced – it looks to a past which cannot hear him and a future which may not understand him and which may not even transpire.

Both, Lionel, the fictional narrator, and Mary Shelley use their creativity to console and to construct a monument for those they have loved and lost. As Mary Shelley wrote in her journal: ‘Yes, I may well describe that solitary being’s feeling, feeling myself the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me’ (*Journals*, 14 May 1824).

Writing for all three, Lionel, the fictional narrator, and Shelley, seems a solitary consolatory task: they are poets of the kind that P. B. Shelley compares to nightingales in *A Defence of Poetry*:

A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, *The Major Works*, 680.

Yet at the same time all three narrators seek an audience, even in the face of its extreme unlikelihood: creativity seeks to be communally significant. For all three suffering, pain and loneliness seem to be prerequisites for creativity but the motivation and purpose of their creativity are to recall happier times and a community they enjoyed being part of. The novel begins with the solitude of the narrator and ends with the solitude of Lionel, but in between it is much concerned with partnerships, families and close social groups.

The plague not only renders negligible the differences between all political systems, it puts into question the notion of time itself. Lionel himself notices this, when he breaks the staff on which he counts the days since the shipwreck and his last social contacts:

Why talk of days—or weeks – or months – I must grasp years in my imagination, if I would truly picture the future to myself – three, five, ten, twenty, fifty anniversaries of that fatal epoch might elapse – every year containing twelve months, each of more numerous calculation in a diary, than the twenty-five days gone by – Can it be? Will it be? – We had been used to look forward to death tremulously –wherefore, but because its place was obscure? But more terrible, and far more obscure, was the unveiled course of my lone futurity. I broke my wand; I threw it from me. I needed no recorder of the inch and barleycorn growth of my life, while my unquiet thoughts created other divisions, than those ruled over by the planets- and, in looking back on the age that had elapsed since I had been alone, I disdained to give the name of days and hours to the throes of agony which had in truth portioned it out. (*LM*, 333)

His loss of confidence in time informs his narrative. He writes his report ‘from a point when time has already lost its former meaning,’ a point when it is less than certain that his work will ever find an audience to read and appreciate it.¹⁴⁷ Without that audience his report threatens to lose its meaning. He compiles a public document, but without a public to read it, it is without value. In this, Lionel’s position parallels that of many Romantic poets, most significantly P. B. Shelley, who failed to find a readership for their work, but the consolation that they could write for posterity, is a consolation that Lionel is denied. In *The*

¹⁴⁷ Richard S. Albright, “‘In the Mean Time, What Did Perdita?’: Rhythms and Reversals in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*”, *Romanticism on the Net: An Electronic Journal Devoted to Romantic Studies*, Vol13, 1999 Feb, (no pagination), 1(on printout).

Last Man not only is the future uncertain, the past and its achievements are lost as well, because there will be no-one left to appreciate them. As Lionel realizes, the plague renders art itself meaningless:

Farewell to the arts, -- to eloquence, which is to the human mind as the winds to the sea, stirring, and then allaying it; -- farewell to poetry and deep philosophy, for man's imagination is cold, and his enquiring mind can no longer expatiate on the wonders of life, for 'there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither though goest!' (*LM*, 234)

The meaning of creativity and the arts is thus again closely connected to the levelling effects of the plague. It is a symbolic gesture when Lionel bids 'farewell to the graceful building, which in its perfect proportion transcended the rude form of nature' (*LM*, 234: he seems to have in mind St Paul's). Raymond had once entertained the ambition of erecting such a building, an Art Gallery which he intended to construct in order to make art publicly available and to improve the education of the people. Of course, he hoped also to create a monument to himself that posterity might behold and cherish. It was a very topical idea. The National Gallery had been founded just two years before the publication of Mary Shelley's novel in 1824 when the Government purchased the art collection of the banker, John Julius Angerstein, and the decision to build a new gallery to house the collection was still under discussion. The idea of a national gallery suggests that, even though a work of art might be the product of a solitary creative artist, it finds its proper end when it is made available to the whole community, and it suggests too that the nation is defined as much by its cultural as its political life. Raymond has undertaken the project at the instigation of Perdita, his wife, which suggests that the Gallery figures the possibility of a harmonious reconciliation between Raymond's private, domestic life and his public duties.

Raymond sets up a competition for the design of the Gallery, which is won by Evadne, the Greek Princess secretly in love with Raymond, who lives in London supporting herself, like many a novel heroine, 'by executing various designs and paintings'

(*LM*, 81). Her successful design is created wholly as a love offering for Raymond: ‘Nothing is so precious to a woman’s heart as the glory and excellence of him she loves; thus in every horror Evadne revelled in his fame and prosperity’ (*LM*, 82). In this act of creation she is not interested in her making her own name but in immortalising the name of her lover: ‘She triumphed in the idea of bestowing, unknown and forgotten as she was, a benefit upon him she loved; and with enthusiastic pride looked forward to the accomplishment of a work of hers, which, immortalized in stone, would go down to posterity stamped with the name of Raymond’ (*LM*, 83). Evadne becomes another of the novel’s versions of the artist, another surrogate, perhaps, for Mary Shelley herself, who, as editor of her husband’s work and even perhaps as the author of a novel designed to vindicate his reputation in the face of his detractors, might think of herself as making him a love offering in which she sacrifices her own artistic identity to his.

When Raymond’s plan comes to nothing, he tries to achieve fame and renown through other means. He goes to Greece in the hope that he might help found an independent Greek nation freed from Turkish oppression. His removal to Greece represents a rejection of society in favour of solitude, and also, paradoxically, of self-absorption in favour of concern for others. But when Raymond arrives in Greece, he becomes, as Byron had done before him, a leader in the Greek War of Independence against the Turks. By a strange paradox, his decision to become once again ‘a solitary man’ results in his becoming the founding father of a nation, a role which, as P. B. Shelley insists in the *Defence of Poetry* identifies him as a poet just as much as if he had designed a building or written a novel.¹⁴⁸

But in the face of the plague the ambition to make one’s name immortal through art or through military prowess seems equally vain. In the end none of the creative projects undertaken in the novel is accomplished. The plague interrupts everything. No National Gallery is built and at the moment when the new nation seems about to be born the plague

¹⁴⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry, The Major Works*, 677.

spreads to Greece. Lionel Verney may complete his narrative, but, so far as he knows, it will find no readers. The only project that is brought to fruition is Mary Shelley's novel itself. But the novel raises a number of crucial questions about creativity. What, Mary Shelley asks, is the function of art? Is its primary function therapeutic, that is, designed like the narrator's and Lionel's narratives, to assuage personal grief. Or might a work of art be better understood as a love-offering, like Evadne's design for a National Gallery, which Evadne claims is designed to perpetuate not her own name but her lover's. Or should creativity be understood as impelled by a desire for justice, of the kind that impelled Lionel to write biographies of those who have been unfairly disparaged, just as Mary Shelley must have written her novel, in part at least, to correct representations of her husband and of Byron. Or should art like politics seek to justify itself by the benefit that it brings to the community? Or should creativity be understood as the reverse of this, as an assertion of self that might equally reveal itself in political or artistic ambitions? Or might creativity result in productions which are distinguished by having a value in and for themselves, so that Raymond's heroic death might have a value whether or not it resulted in the establishment of Greek Independence, and Lionel's narrative might have a value whether or not it found a reader. Many of Mary Shelley's contemporaries, amongst them her husband, evaded these questions by suggesting that artists should address themselves not to the present but to the future, that they should address not a contemporary readership but posterity. The premise on which Mary Shelley builds her novel seems designed to deny any such evasion: the plague makes it impossible for Lionel to do any more than hope that he will have any posterity. Lionel writes without having a very clear notion of what he is writing for. Mary Shelley's novel leaves us wondering whether all writers might not be in exactly that uncomfortable position.

It is interesting that Mary Shelley has Adrian – the character most closely modelled on Shelley, as he was, or as she would have liked him to have been – assume the rule of his

country and people only when it is too late to change anything. This suggests that she believes his ideas and ideals to be, in Morton Paley's words, 'admirable, but useless'.¹⁴⁹

'In *The Last Man*,' according to Giovanni Franci, 'the destruction of the world' not only 'implies the end of the heroic affirmation of the individual' but the end of any kind of affirmation in general since there is no public left to affirm the individual's heroic status.¹⁵⁰ In Mellor's words, the plague represents 'an implacable nature which annihilates individual achievements and family relationships through chance, accident, and death'.¹⁵¹ It 'rapidly breaks loose various fixed identities or dynamics, unsettling, dislocating, and displacing the existing chain of identities and events,'¹⁵² but it does so to no end. Instead we are offered 'an inversion of the history of civilization': 'the plague erodes, eradicates, and annihilates existing law and power'.¹⁵³ The plague renders everything that seems of any value meaningless. The novel does not seem to leave its reader even with a 'gleam of hope' that 'still stubbornly remains' but rather offers an entirely pessimistic outlook into the future, if indeed it allows the possibility of a future at all.¹⁵⁴

2.5. Conclusion

Betty Bennett notes that '*The Last Man*, has been characterized as a rejection of Shelleyan Romanticism and thereby of Shelley himself.'¹⁵⁵ It is, then, a primary text of what I call Romantic disillusionment, or what prefers to call 'Romantic dislocation'.¹⁵⁶ As such it is a primary text to counter arguments that '[t]hroughout her reception, Shelley has been dismissed precisely for *not* being the origin of her texts' meanings, for merely translating

¹⁴⁹ Dawson, 'Re-Collecting Shelley: A Reading of Mary Shelley's *Last Man*', 256.

¹⁵⁰ Franci, 'A Mirror in the Future: Vision and Apocalypse in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*', 188.

¹⁵¹ Mellor, 'Love Guilt and Reparation', 148.

¹⁵² Young-Ok, "'Read Your Fall": The Signs of Plague in *The Last Man*', 1.

¹⁵³ Young-Ok, "'Read Your Fall": The Signs of Plague in *The Last Man*', 5.

¹⁵⁴ Jean de Palacio, 'Mary Shelley and *The Last Man*: A Minor Romantic Theme', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, Vol. 42, 1968, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Betty Bennett, 'Radical Imaginings: Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*', 147.

¹⁵⁶ Betty Bennett, 'Radical Imaginings: Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*', 147.

the ideas of others [men]’.¹⁵⁷ For David Vallins the novel is designed as a devastating ‘criticism of Romantic optimism’.¹⁵⁸ Yet, although I agree with this analysis, and have tried to show that Mary Shelley rejects her husband’s and her father’s philosophies, I would not go so far as to suggest that she rejected the men themselves. Rather, as I have indicated, *The Last Man* is intended as a biography of sorts of P. B. Shelley, and thus a justification and clarification of his life and character. Betty Bennett argues that ‘rather than deny Shelley’s and her parents’ political ideologies in *The Last Man*, she continues to voice them as a survivor, as does Verney’.¹⁵⁹ This chapter, however, has suggested that this is not the case. Rather, as Barbara Johnson concludes, ‘Mary Shelley outlines a critique of each of the projects of reform dear to her father William Godwin and her husband Percy Shelley. In other words, each time we are about to draw a lesson from the narrative of the political events, the plague arrives to erase the question.’¹⁶⁰ Or in the words of Giovanna Franci: ‘the romance, the utopia of a “new paradise” as conceived by Percy Bysshe Shelley, remains still-born because “the earth is not and cannot be a paradise” and the tone of the novel is ‘tragically ironic’.¹⁶¹ The plague ‘challenges Enlightenment optimism about reason’s power to save humankind’.¹⁶² As Morton Paley observes, *The Last Man* ‘denies linkage of apocalypse and millennium’ and thus criticizes, amongst other works of the Romantic era, her own husband’s *Prometheus Unbound*: in *The Last Man* ‘signs of millennium appear only to be dissipated’.¹⁶³ As Hutchings puts it, Lionel’s ‘character – and the novel he narrates- embodies a potent critique of the dualistic, anti-material philosophy

¹⁵⁷ Goldsmith, ‘Of Gender, Plague, and Apocalypse’, 161.

¹⁵⁸ David Vallins, ‘Mary Shelley and the Lake Poets: Negation and Transcendence in *Lodore*’, in *Mary Shelley’s Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (Houndmills; Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), 169.

¹⁵⁹ Betty Bennett, ‘Radical Imaginings: Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, 151.

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, ‘The Last Man’, 263.

¹⁶¹ Franci, ‘A Mirror in the Future: Vision and Apocalypse in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*’, 185.

¹⁶² Anne-Lise Francois and Daniel Mozes, ‘Don’t Say “I Love you”’: Agency, Gender and Romanticism in Mary Shelley’s *Matilda*’, in *Mary Shelley’s Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 57-74, 58.

¹⁶³ Paley, ‘Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*: Apocalypse without Millennium’, 110.

informing humanist theory and practice in contemporary Romantic society'.¹⁶⁴ Mary Shelley also 'firmly rejects both the biblical claim that human beings are the inheritors of the earth and the Romantic secular cult of the titanic human imagination'.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, 'Mary Shelley represents the failure of [...] virtually all optimistic philosophies about human perfectibility'.¹⁶⁶ The novel shows how '[t]he characters [...] discuss and try to enact various reforming and revolutionary solutions, but all such endeavors prove to be a failure in Mary Shelley's pessimistic and apocalyptic world of the future.'¹⁶⁷ The novel is an act of rebellion 'against the political faith of her parents' generation' and constitutes 'an obituary on the idea that the social organism has a natural imperative toward survival and improvement.'¹⁶⁸

Nature in the novel is not represented as the nurturing friend of humanity as in much other Romantic literature but rather as aloof from and even disregarding of human life. Godwin believed that even disease could be overcome by an exertion of the human mind. Mary Shelley reverses this optimistic view: in her novel disease overpowers and annihilates the whole human race.¹⁶⁹ The novel elaborately debates whether happiness should be sought in the public or private spheres, in an active life or a life given over to contemplation, only as a prelude to a narrative in which each possibility is shown to be equally futile. It is its baleful pessimism that led contemporary reviewers to describe the novel as 'a sickening repetition of horrors,'¹⁷⁰ 'the offspring of a diseased imagination, and of a most polluted taste,'¹⁷¹ and an 'abortion'.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁴ Hutchings, "A Dark Image in a Phantasmagoria", 242.

¹⁶⁵ Lokke, '*The Last Man*', 118.

¹⁶⁶ Lowe-Evans, *Critical Essays on Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Lee Sterrenburg, '*The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions*', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Vol. 33, 1978, 328.

¹⁶⁸ Sterrenburg, '*The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions*', 331/32.

¹⁶⁹ See Sterrenburg, '*The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions*', 334.

¹⁷⁰ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c*, No 474, 18 Feb. 1826, 56.

¹⁷¹ *Monthly Review*, N.S.1 (1826), 333-35.

¹⁷² *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 21 (1827), 54.

3. The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck

The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck is one of Mary Shelley's least discussed novels. This chapter will explore the novel's rich material and unravel its many layers in order to suggest that this neglect is unjust, and that, contrary to the claims of many contemporary as well as modern critics, Mary Shelley's later novels are by no means of lesser quality than her earlier ones. I begin with a brief outline of the life of the historical Perkin Warbeck. I go on to discuss other fictional treatments of the topic, and attempt to explain the fascination with it. This is followed by a discussion of how Mary Shelley adapts the historical novel as it was developed by Sir Walter Scott, in particular by feminizing the genre which is again proceeded by an argument about the notion of chivalry in Romantic texts. It is a notion, as I explain, closely related to notions such as honour, duty, and the relation between the private and the public spheres, that continued to interest Mary Shelley throughout her literary career. The last part of the chapter explores the strong autobiographical element in *Perkin Warbeck*.

In *Perkin Warbeck* Mary Shelley, unlike most of her contemporaries and specifically unlike Sir Walter Scott, makes no attempt to arrive at a formal resolution of the various issues that the novel addresses. For example, she reaches no conclusion as to whether chivalry is essentially a good or bad institution any more than she is concerned to resolve the issue of whether 'Richard of York' is indeed who he claims to be or rather the low-born impostor 'Perkin Warbeck'. More importantly, she does not try to smooth out inconsistencies in character, particularly in the cases of Richard of York and Henry VII. Throughout, she displays a Keatsian ability to rest content with doubt, and to avoid reaching irritably after fact and certainty.

3. 1. Perkin Warbeck: Historical Context and Overview

Despite changing some details and inventing episodes and characters, Mary Shelley remains close to her historical sources. In her Preface she mentions five principal sources; Hume, Bacon, Hall, Holinshed, and Pinkerton.¹⁷³ Of these, all except Pinkerton represent Perkin Warbeck as a counterfeit, a fraud or an impersonator. Holinshed does not pass any direct judgment, but he does describe Perkin's speech at the court of King James IV of Scotland as a 'counterfeit tale'.¹⁷⁴ Pinkerton, on the other hand, consistently refers to 'Perkin Warbec, or Richard Duke of York,' and explicitly refuses any discussion of 'the arguments for, and against, his being the real son of Edward IV'.¹⁷⁵ But it is no longer possible to share Pinkerton's confidence that '[t]he story of Perkin Warbeck, or Richard Duke of York, is so well known that it is unnecessary to expatiate a subject more properly belonging to English history'.¹⁷⁶

Perkin's own confession – which one has to bear in mind, may have been enforced – offers the best brief summary of his career. He explains that he 'was borne in the towne of Turneie in Flanders'¹⁷⁷ and gives details about his parents and relatives. He mentions how he was educated in Antwerp and Middleborow and how he then 'went into Portingall in companie of sir Edward Brampton's wife'.¹⁷⁸ From Portugal he ventures to Ireland, where people believe him to be a variety of individuals related to the house of York until finally it is settled that he is Edward IV's second son and his sponsors 'against [his] will

¹⁷³ Mary Shelley's sources are: Francis Bacon, *The Historie of the Raigne of King Henry the Seventh* (London: Matthew Lownes and William Barret, 1622), Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre and York [etc.]* (London: R. Grafton, 1548), Raphaell Holinshed, *The First Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande [etc.]*, (London: G. Bishop, 1577), and John Pinkerton, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of the House of Stuart to that of Mary with Appendixes of Original Papers*, 2 volumes, (London: C. Dilly, 1797).

¹⁷⁴ Holinshed, *The First Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande [etc.]*, 781.

¹⁷⁵ Pinkerton, *The History of Scotland*, 26.

¹⁷⁶ Pinkerton, *The History of Scotland*, 26.

¹⁷⁷ Holinshed, *The First Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande [etc.]*, 781.

¹⁷⁸ Holinshed, *The First Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande [etc.]*, 781.

made [him] to learne English, and taught [him] what [he] should doo and saie'.¹⁷⁹ The confession sums up the rest of what happened quite succinctly:

The French K. sent an ambassador onto Ireland [...] to aduertise me to come into France. And thense I went into France, and from thense into Flanders, & from Flanders into Ireland, and from Ireland into Scotland, & so into England.¹⁸⁰

Mary Shelley follows this outline fairly closely, except that for Portugal she substitutes the Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella (probably in order to make it more plausible that Perkin should emerge from his stay there as a war-proven knight) and she adds an episode that is not included in the confession but appears in the other histories, Perkin's visit to his aunt Margaret of Burgundy, who first denies but then recognizes his legitimacy, welcomes him as her nephew and supports him with troops, ships and money.

The confession, of course, cannot be taken at face value, as it might very likely have been put into Perkin's mouth by Henry VII. Indeed, Ann Wroe claims that King Henry had had it written and ready for four years before Perkin's capture.¹⁸¹ This offers one explanation of the consistency that Gairdner offers as evidence for the truth of Henry's allegations: 'All this Henry declared from the first, and he never varied from the tale.'¹⁸² How could he, if he had had it written in the first place? All modern scholars, including Gairdner, agree that '[m]uch does not fit into the neat parameters of the official confession, and never has. A different story, perhaps a surprising one, may have been unfolding here. The truth lies somewhere in the details.'¹⁸³ Or, in Gairdner's words, 'The career of Perkin Warbeck, whatever may be thought of his pretensions, was certainly in itself so extraordinary that it is no wonder it gave rise, even from the first, to a good many strange

¹⁷⁹ Holinshed, *The First Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande [etc.]*, 781.

¹⁸⁰ Holinshed, *The First Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande [etc.]*, 781.

¹⁸¹ Ann Wroe, *Perkin: A Story of Deception* (London: Jonathan Cape, Random House, 2003), 339.

¹⁸² James Gairdner, *History of the Life and Reign of Richard the Third, to which is Added the Story of Perkin Warbeck from Original Documents*, rev.edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), 277.

¹⁸³ Wroe, *Perkin*, viii.

and inconsistent statements.¹⁸⁴ Another modern study, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, by Ian Arthurson, like Gairdner, both relies on and questions the confession. Arthurson writes that ‘whenever historians have pursued its detail, and they have done so to considerable extent, they have found evidence which substantiates it. And yet it remains tantalizingly unsatisfactory a completely incomplete document’.¹⁸⁵ A letter Perkin supposedly wrote to his mother in Turnai asking her for money in order to bribe his guards into more civil behaviour towards him (a letter which itself only exists in two copies and might well have been distributed by Henry VII’s agents) is presented in both studies as evidence that Perkin is an impostor, yet as there is no original extant the evidence is unsafe. Gairdner and Arthurson conclude that ‘[t]he temptation to accept the first fantastic solution, Warbeck was Richard Plantagenet, is considerable, but should be resisted’¹⁸⁶ whereas Ann Wroe in her even more detailed study concludes that both options are equally likely. So, all that is really to be learned from old as well as modern histories is that there are irresolvable inconsistencies. Mary Shelley might have known other sources, for example French and Latin Chronicles. For certain episodes she relied on histories of Scotland and Ireland. She is certainly indebted to Bayley and Walpole who had both written revisionist histories designed to vindicate Richard III by suggesting that he did not murder his nephews.¹⁸⁷ Bayley, importantly, makes the point, that Perkin’s history was first told by those who had an interest in his being recognized as an impostor:

It must be admitted that, at the first account, appearances are much against Richard; but it is worthy of remark, that almost all that has been advanced against him was

¹⁸⁴ Gairdner, *History of the Life and Reign of Richard the Third*, 263.

¹⁸⁵ Ian Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy: 1491-1499* (Dover: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994), 3.

¹⁸⁶ Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, 25.

¹⁸⁷ Mary Shelley does not explicitly mention these sources, but in her ‘Preface’ she writes that ‘Records exist in the Tower, some well known, others with which those who have access to those interesting papers are alone acquainted, which put the question almost beyond a doubt’ (*PW*, 5). Here she almost certainly refers to John Bayley, *The History and Antiquity of the Tower of London* (1825), and Horace Walpole, *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* (London: J. Dodsley, 1768).

written in the succeeding reign – a period when popular prejudice was incited to the highest degree against his memory; and when, perhaps, nothing could with safety have been recorded in his favor.¹⁸⁸

Bayley adds that Richard was the first to swear fealty to his nephew and thus at least at that moment can only have intended to reign as protector until Edward V was of age.¹⁸⁹ He argues briefly, as Walpole does in more detail, that Richard III would never have entrusted the message that supposedly condemned the two young princes to a mere page. He also would never have put an order like that in writing, given that its discovery would endanger his future reign.¹⁹⁰ In Walpole's enthusiastic words:

it is difficult to crowd more improbabilities and lies together than are comprehended in this short narrative. Who can believe that if Richard meditated the murder, that he took no care to sift Brakenbury, before he left London? Who can believe that he would trust so atrocious a commission to a letter? And who can imagine that on Brakenbury's non-compliance Richard would have ordered him to cede the government of the Tower to Tirrel for one night only, the purpose of which had been so plainly pointed out by the preceding message?¹⁹¹

Bayley observes that 'we find that very strong doubts were entertained, even in the reign of Henry the Seventh, whether the children had been put to death or not'.¹⁹² Walpole adds, '[i]t must be observed too, that no inquiry was made into the murder on the accession of Henry the Seventh, the natural time for it, when the passions of men were heated, and when the Duke of Norfolk, Lord Lovel, Catesby, Ratcliffe, and the real abettors or accomplices of Richard were attained and executed'.¹⁹³ Furthermore, 'no prosecution of the supposed assassins was even thought of till eleven years afterwards on the appearance of

¹⁸⁸ Bayley, *The History and Antiquity of the Tower of London*, 63/64.

¹⁸⁹ Bayley, *The History and Antiquity of the Tower of London*, 53.

¹⁹⁰ Bayley, *The History and Antiquity of the Tower of London*, 61.

¹⁹¹ Walpole, *Historic Doubts*, 53.

¹⁹² Bayley, *The History and Antiquity of the Tower of London*, 61.

¹⁹³ Walpole, *Historic Doubts*, 58.

Perkin Warbeck'.¹⁹⁴ This indeed is curious, as one might think that Henry would want to demonstrate that there were no superior claimants who could threaten his right to his throne. He cannot simply have accepted Richard III's bastardisation of Edward IV's children, or he would never have married Elizabeth, daughter of Edward, in order to strengthen his own claims. So, Walpole concludes that 'Henry had never been certain of the deaths of the princes, nor ever interested himself to prove that both were dead, till he had great reason to believe that one of them was alive'.¹⁹⁵ Walpole also argues that Richard III never published the death of both princes which he would have done if he had murdered them for his own security: '[a]s Richard gained the crown by the illegitimacy of his nephews, his causing them to be murdered, would [...] only have shown that he did not trust to that plea'.¹⁹⁶ Bayley and Walpole offer important authority for Mary Shelley's presentation of the truth of Perkin's claim as unresolved. Mary Shelley added three characters, who are not historical; Edmund Plantagenet, the illegitimate son of Richard III, who trains Richard in the warrior virtues and becomes his loyal supporter; Hernan de Faro, a Spanish Moor and sailor, and Monina, his daughter, who become Richard's most devoted supporters even though they do not share his nationality.

3. 2. The Literary Context

Thematically, again like *The Last Man*, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* is far from original: it has to be considered in the context of a long-lasting literary fascination with the topic of the pretender to the English throne. John Ford's play *The Chronicle Histories of Perkin Warbeck: A Strange Truth* (1634) is the most significant literary precursor of Mary Shelley's novel, and Alexander Campbell's, *Perkin Warbeck; or the Court of James the Fourth of Scotland*, published in the same year as Mary Shelley's novel, is an exactly

¹⁹⁴ Walpole, *Historic Doubts*, 59.

¹⁹⁵ Walpole, *Historic Doubts*, 59.

¹⁹⁶ Walpole, *Historic Doubts*, 73.

contemporary treatment of the same material. While these are the more dominant literary attempts in the description of the life of Perkin Warbeck, it is interesting to note that even the German poet Friedrich Schiller attempted a play about this character and that Bram Stoker was still fascinated by him in his *Famous Impostors*. John Ford's play offers a necessarily more concise version of Perkin/Richard's career than Mary Shelley's novel. It begins at the court of Henry VII shortly before Perkin/Richard joins the court of James IV of Scotland. The play gives strong roles to Clifford as an informer and to Frion as Perkin/Richard's secretary and mentor. It traces the friendship that arises between James and Richard/ Perkin and suggests that his defeat is partly owing to his reluctance to be responsible for the ravage of his own country. The play ends just before Richard's/ Perkin's execution. Interestingly, Richard/Perkin dies without making a confession, so that the question of the legitimacy of his claim is left unresolved. In all of this Mary Shelley is indebted to Ford, but she is most indebted to him in her depiction of Lady Katherine. As Ford's editor notes, 'the conception of Katherine herself, as well as those of Perkin and Henry, the opposing actor kings, is original, transcending the characterisations found in the sources'.¹⁹⁷ Ford's Katherine is a strong, passionate woman. As she tells her husband,

I am your wife,
No human power can or shall divorce
My faith from duty.¹⁹⁸

She insists on staying with him come what may. Mary Shelley's Katherine is similarly headstrong, as is Campbell's Catherine:

"I meant to accompany thee that I may share in thy danger, and if it should so please Heaven, that I may witness thy success. I mean to be thy handmaiden, my love," she continued, "as well as thy wife. To tend thee if thou art wounded- to comfort thee if thou art defeated- and to perish with thee if thou art doomed to fall."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Colin Gobson, 'Introductory Note', 223.

¹⁹⁸ John Ford, *The Chronicle Histories of Perkin Warbeck: A Strange Truth* (London: H. Beeston, 1634), 303.

¹⁹⁹ Alexander Campbell, *Perkin Warbeck; or the Court of James the Fourth of Scotland* (London: A.K. Newman and Co, 1830), Vol III, 105.

Clearly, in presenting the relationship between husband and wife as affective rather than simply dynastic, Ford gave the nineteenth-century novelists one element that was essential if they were to adapt the historical material to the taste of the novel-reading public. But Mary Shelley, who quotes from Ford's play in her own novel, is also indebted to him in her characterization of Richard. As Lisa Hopkins observes, 'her Duke Richard is, at times, virtually a carbon copy of Ford's Perkin in his unflinching nobility, his utter conviction of his own right, and, most of all, his hopeless revulsion at the suffering that the short-lived invasion of Northumberland imposes on the inhabitants there'.²⁰⁰ Hopkins has in mind episodes such as Perkin's reaction after the Scottish army raids Northumbria:

'O Sir, then give me leave to yield to nature 56
 I am most miserable; had I been
 Born what this clergyman would by defame
 Baffle belief with, I had never sought
 The truth of mine inheritance with rapes 60
 Of women, or of infants murder'd, virgins
 Deflower'd, old men butcher'd, dwellings fir'd,
 My land depopulated, and my people
 Afflicted with a Kingdom's devastation.
 Show me remorse, great King, or I shall never 65
 Endure such havoc with dry eyes.
 Spare, spare, my dear, dear England.'²⁰¹

Shelley's Richard, as I shall show, reacts very similarly, but even Campbell has Perkin say, 'I would [...] have no unnecessary blood shed on my account', though Campbell seems to think that such scruples betray a cowardly weakness.

Alexander Campbell's *Perkin Warbeck* is not historically a very accurate novel. It concentrates on Perkin's visit to King James IV of Scotland. Campbell makes Perkin the pretended older son of Edward IV instead of the younger. He has James receive Perkin in Holyrood Palace instead of Stirling Castle, and he has Perkin captured in an encounter with

²⁰⁰ Lisa Hopkins, 'The Self and the Monstrous', *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley after Frankenstein*, ed. Syndy M. Conger et al (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1997), 265.

²⁰¹ Ford, *The Chronicle Histories of Perkin Warbeck*, 290.

the English army close to the Scottish border that never actually took place. Perkin is hanged as a consequence of this capture and the rest of his adventures are simply cut out. The first volume spends most of its time introducing the king himself and showing his adventurous nature. Perkin himself appears only in the second volume, which consists of tournaments, celebrations, Perkin's wooing of Catherine and their wedding which goes ahead despite ominous prophecies. The last volume consists of preparations for the battle, the encounter with the English army, Perkin's capture, Catherine's following him into captivity and his final execution. Unlike Ford or Shelley, Campbell from the beginning makes it clear that he believes Perkin to be a counterfeit. He describes him as follows:

his person was of the largest size; but well proportioned, and though stout and muscular, bespoke not that languid inertness, so frequently apparent in men of more than ordinary stature; his features were bold but regular, and the whole countenance, when cursorily scanned, or when he to whom it belonged was conscious of being the object of attention, was open, cheerful, and noble, in a remarkable degree; a stolen glance, however, of that countenance, never failed to detect it, under a very different phase. When unaware of being marked, the acute observer might perceive an expression of intense and perplexing thought - an occasional knitting of the eyebrows- an austere compression of the lips, all bespeaking to the shrewd physiognomist, a mind but ill at ease, and that not from sorrow or misfortune, but from guilt, and habitual communion with dark and dangerous thoughts.²⁰²

Elsewhere, he is described by a blackmailer, Barnard Chudworth, as 'no other than the celebrated impostor, Perkin Warbeck himself'.²⁰³ Mary Shelley's novel, even though it was not particularly well received, was judged superior. As Dunleavy suggests, 'Perhaps the chief reason for even this limited success was Mary Shelley's determination to maintain in her version a balance between history and romance, at the same time taking care to construct a reasonably accurate setting for her characters whether in Spain, Scotland,

²⁰² Campbell, *Perkin Warbeck*, Vol. II, 4/5.

²⁰³ Campbell, *Perkin Warbeck*, Vol. II, 17.

Cornwall, or the Cork-Waterford area of southern Ireland which Crofton Croker knew at first hand.²⁰⁴

Shelley inclines to the view that Richard/Perkin is the rightful heir to the English crown, except that she leaves it quite unresolved what confers right. Sites insists that the novel conforms to the political ideology shared by Shelley's parents and her husband: 'Shelley vividly reiterates her husband's interpretation of the ramifications of the English revolution in *A Philosophical View of Reform*: "A man has no right to be a King or a Lord or a Bishop but so long as it is for the benefit of the People."²⁰⁵ But this seems to impose a consistency on the novel to which it can lay no proper claim. There are passages in the novel in which Perkin's status seems to have to do not with his birth, nor with whether or not his rule would conduce to the common weal, but to his personal qualities, and in particular his display of chivalric virtues. In his 'Essay on Chivalry' Sir Walter Scott writes that 'the love of personal freedom, and the obligation to maintain and defend it in the persons of others as in their own, was a duty particularly incumbent on those who attained the honour of chivalry'.²⁰⁶ These are qualities that Richard/Perkin very often displays, but he does not display them consistently. For example, on one occasion he even seeks sanctuary to protect his own person and leaves his host leaderless. Nevertheless, Mary Shelley regularly contrasts the chivalric virtues to which Perkin/Richard lays claim with the petty, vindictive, mercenary qualities of his more successful rival, Henry VII. Mary Shelley grants to him, as she grants to most of her heroes, the qualities that she ascribed to her own husband: he is possessed of 'a quick sympathy with his species, and a reverence for all that bore the shape of man'.²⁰⁷ These are precisely the qualities that she represents

²⁰⁴ Gareth W. Dunleavy, 'Two New Mary Shelley Letters and the "Irish" Chapters of *Perkin Warbeck*', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 13, 1964, 10.

²⁰⁵ Melissa Sites, 'Chivalry and Utopian Domesticity in Mary Shelley's *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*', *European Romantic Review* Vol. 16 No.5, 2005, 531.

²⁰⁶ Sir Walter Scott, 'An Essay on Chivalry', *The Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. 6, 10.

²⁰⁷ Mary Shelley, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck. A Romance*, ed. Doucet Devin Fischer (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), from now on quoted in the text as *PW*. The quotation here is from page 315.

Henry VII as entirely lacking. It follows that Perkin is fatally handicapped when he engages in a struggle for the throne with his unscrupulous rival by his possession of precisely those virtues that would ensure that his rule, if ever he were allowed to assume it, would be benevolent. The qualities that would make him a good governor are exactly the same as those that ensure that he will never succeed in establishing a government. The novel offers a complex, even an inconsistent political analysis, too complex for the novel's critics, almost all of whom seem anxious to simplify Mary Shelley's position. Garbin, for example, argues that

[a]lthough Mary Shelley's "Richard" is made the rightful heir to the throne of England, his actions to obtain recognition as such by chivalric standards are viewed as illegitimate and fallacious. Mary Shelley's condemnation of usurped and legitimate monarchy derived from her view that both Henry VII and Richard failed in what they should have been able to achieve as leaders- namely, the realization of the common wealth.²⁰⁸

Bennett on the other hand suggests that '[b]y regarding Richard as the legitimate heir to the throne rather than as a fraud perpetrated by the Yorkists (most historical accounts credit the latter as true), Mary Shelley attacked the principle of "legitimate" monarchical power, an attack she repeats in 1844 in *Rambles in Germany and Italy*'.²⁰⁹ Neither of these accounts can accommodate Mary Shelley's willingness to allow on occasion that no matter what the moral character of the ruler, England under Henry VII is in a prosperous state, although it is true that she offers at other times the view that he is a tyrant and his rule oppressive. Similarly, her insistence on Perkin/Richard's virtues does not seem to prompt as a necessary conclusion either that he would be a good ruler or that his struggle to assert his right to the throne is justified. It is a novel that seems to put in question any confidence that

²⁰⁸ Lidia Garbin, 'The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck: Walter Scott in the Writings of Mary Shelley', *Romanticism on the Net*, Vol. 6, 1997, (no pagination) 3 (on printout).

²⁰⁹ Betty T. Bennett, 'The Political Philosophy of Mary Shelley's Historical Novels: *Valperga* and *Perkin Warbeck*', in *The Evidence of Imagination: Studies of Interaction between Life and Art in English Romantic Literature*, ed Donald H. Reiman et al. (New York: NY University Press, 1978), pp.354-71, 365.

complex political realities are congruent with the ideologies with which most commentators attempt to analyse them. As Lisa Garbin observes, '[t]he fictionalization of Perkin Warbeck as the true Richard of York, however, allowed Mary Shelley to attack both legitimate and usurped monarchy and absolutist power'.²¹⁰ Yet, as Garbin fails to add, she leaves it radically uncertain what form a political power of which she could approve might take.

In this novel, Shelley again manages to work into the character of Richard many of the ideas of her husband. Like Richard, Percy was full of benevolent schemes and like him he was powerless to realize them. Yet, through the discussion of Perkin's/ Richard's life Shelley also voices her concerns about an issue that was important to both the Shelleys: the idea of legitimacy. This idea was –towards the end of the long eighteenth century- one of great importance. With the Congress of Vienna reinstating all 'legitimate' monarchs throughout Europe, the question of what is and what is not legitimate was an urgent one. The Shelleys, both being ardent republicans, believed that a legitimate leader is one who is elected by the people whom he is supposed to govern. Yet, for the leaders of the Congress of Vienna legitimacy was conferred by a hereditary claim to a throne. In this context *Perkin Warbeck* becomes less a vindication of a person and more a challenge to the conventional understanding of legitimacy. Perkin, if he is who he claims to be, might have dynastic rights to the throne, yet Henry, despite his rather obscure background, manages to gain the support of his countrymen. Moreover, through his marriage with Elizabeth he unites the houses of York and Lancaster and thus creates the basis for lasting peace and a prosperous country. Richard, on the other hand, insists on his claims, despite the fact that he clearly lacks the support of his people. In this Shelley depicts him as selfish and although she sympathizes with his character, she grants Henry the victory, as he seems to be the best king for most people, even though he might not have been the first in line to the throne. In writing this sort of history, at first making the reader believe that she herself

²¹⁰ Garbin, '*The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*', 3 (on printout).

believes Richard to be the true heir to the English throne and have him challenge the person who actually managed to occupy the said throne, she shows us that political differences rarely coincide with the difference between good and evil. Here again, she seems to be disagreeing with her husband who very often suggested just that. In *Prometheus Unbound* for example Prometheus clearly is good and wronged and Jupiter is oppressive. Mary suggests that the issue is more complex. Henry may occupy a throne that is not his in terms of legitimate descent, yet he is the ruler who best serves the needs of the people, so that he is the legitimate ruler as Mary Shelley and her husband understand it: that is, he has the people's support.

3. 3. Sir Walter Scott, Chivalry, and the Historical Novel

In *Perkin Warbeck* Mary Shelley writes:

We must remember that this was the age of chivalry; the spirit of Edward the Third and the princely Dukes of Burgundy yet survived. Louis the Eleventh in France had done much to quench it; it burnt bright again under the auspices of his son. Henry the Seventh was its bitter enemy. (*PW*, 210)

Clearly she intends her novel to engage in the debate concerning the value of chivalry which, for her contemporaries, had been initiated by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections upon the French Revolution*, where he laments its disappearance:

But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom.²¹¹

For Burke, the age of chivalry is replaced by an age of political economy which for him signifies a loss of generosity, loyalty, and freedom. As Brewer points out, he was amongst

²¹¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event*, 10th edition (London: J Dodsley, 1791), 113.

the first of many to address the issue: ‘As the industrial revolution transformed England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a number of important writers re-evaluated the precapitalist institution of chivalry.’²¹² William Godwin placed this same social transformation earlier. In his *St Leon* he observes the same changes taking place in the late 16th century. As Brewer notes, ‘Mary Shelley’s conception of chivalry was [...] most profoundly influenced by the writings of her father, William Godwin’.²¹³ Indeed, in *Perkin Warbeck*, she locates the same transformation even earlier, during the reign of Henry VII, which marks for her the victory of commercial over chivalric values. This new age of economy is represented as in part responsible for the difficulties Richard/Perkin faces when he tries to reinstate himself on the English throne:

The spirit of chivalry, which isolates man, had given place to that of trade, which unites them in bodies. Among these, the White Rose of England had not a single partizan---the nobles who once had upheld the house of York were few; they had for the last eight years been intent upon restoring their fortunes, and were wholly disinclined to the endangering them afresh for a stranger youth. (*PW*, 306/07)

Brewer accepts that Godwin developed a complex response to ‘the mixed and equivocal accomplishments of chivalry’.²¹⁴ He had balanced the relative value of the chivalric code and the values that had replaced it in his *Caleb Williams*, which I will discuss more thoroughly when I investigate the notion of honour in *Perkin Warbeck*. Brewer argues that Godwin and Shelley agree in the view that chivalry had been, or was being, replaced by a ‘commercial spirit’ (*PW*, 306) which ‘encourages economic and social stability, it creates a world in which the old chivalric virtues of honor, loyalty, physical courage, and reverence

²¹² William D. Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol.35 No.2, 1999, 187.

²¹³ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 188.

²¹⁴ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 189/90.

toward women are no longer valued and in which men are dedicated to the acquisition of wealth rather than the “cultivation of the private affections”²¹⁵.

This marks Richard/Perkin who practises chivalry and fights on the battlefield as an outmoded figure who is inevitably defeated in his contest with Henry who rules through negotiation and treachery.²¹⁶ One of the ways in which Richard/Perkin demonstrates his adherence to chivalric virtues is by maintaining a reverential respect for women. Henry by contrast treats women with contempt, especially if they –as is the case with his wife, Elizabeth- do not contribute treasure to his coffers.²¹⁷ Accordingly, ‘[i]n *St. Leon* and *Perkin Warbeck* chivalry is associated with the elevation of women, and the pursuit of wealth is linked with their devaluation and mistreatment’.²¹⁸ As Mary Shelley writes in a letter of 3 December 1824, ‘[t]he cold and avaricious King Henry is a prototype for the selfish and ruthlessly competitive men of the nineteenth century who will help “poor & unprotected” women only if it squares with their self-interest’.²¹⁹ Brewer is right to insist that ‘Shelley’s appraisal of chivalry,’ or at least its values and ideals, ‘was partly influenced by her dissatisfaction with the social mores of her times’.²²⁰ But in *Caleb Williams*, in which women play only a minor role (it has been identified as the first novel in English not to incorporate a love story) the chivalric values associated with the hero/villain of the novel, Falkland, seem to be founded on an insistence on the rights of birth. They are represented, in however debased a form, by the magistrate who comments, ‘A fine time of it indeed it would be, if, when gentlemen of six thousand a year take up

²¹⁵ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 189/90.

²¹⁶ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 190.

²¹⁷ See Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 194.

²¹⁸ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 192.

²¹⁹ Quoted in Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 202/03.

²²⁰ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 203

their servants for robbing them, those servants could trump up such accusations as these, and could get any magistrate or court of justice to listen to them!’²²¹

In *Perkin Warbeck* Mary Shelley seems concerned to explore a transitional moment, a moment perhaps best embodied in the novel in the character of Clifford. Clifford begins the novel as a passionate exponent of chivalric values, and yet in his actions he comes increasingly to be motivated by a constant need for money.²²² He remains throughout the novel torn between two identities: ‘there clung to this unfortunate man a sense of what he ought to and might have been, and a burning consciousness of what he was’ (*PW*, 170). He is the character in the novel who is most clearly caught between two worlds, the world of chivalry and the world of the economists: ‘He was generous; but that led to rapacity; since, unable to deny himself or others, if he despoiled himself one day, on the next he engaged in the most desperate enterprises to refill the void’ (*PW*, 338/39). It is a double-mindedness that reveals itself most forcibly in his relationship with Monina who inspires in him a devotion that seems at first chivalric but rather quickly descends into a determination to rape her. ‘Like Henry, [Clifford] is incapable of selfless love- he becomes obsessed with Monina, but she inspires “passion...and jealousy” in him, not the “friendship” (169) or esteem that underpins chivalric relationships between men and women’.²²³

In part, Mary Shelley seems to share her father’s qualified admiration for chivalric values but in the character of Richard/Perkin she clearly shows that these same values inspire Richard to wage war in his own country, threatening the prosperity that the corrupt rule of Henry VII has secured: ‘His belief that he occupies the moral high ground is undermined by the fact that he, like Henry Tudor, is willing to sacrifice the lives of others

²²¹ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 276.

²²² See Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 195.

²²³ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 195.

in order to obtain power for himself.’²²⁴ Mary Shelley’s novel even occasionally suggests a sympathy with the view of chivalry most forcibly expressed by Byron, in the Preface to the first two cantos of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, where he writes that ‘[t]he vows of chivalry were no better kept than any other vows whatsoever; and the songs of the Troubadours were not more decent, and certainly were much less refined, than those of Ovid’. He continues: ‘So much for chivalry. Burke need not have regretted that its days are over, though Marie-Antoinette was quite as chaste as most of those in whose honour lances were shivered, and knights unhorsed’.²²⁵

Mary Shelley seems torn between the defenders and the deriders of the chivalric ideal. On the one hand, she wants to allow the merits of chivalry, as even her husband does when in the *Defence of Poetry* he argues that chivalry promoted respect for women. On the other hand she is alert to the limitations of the code. Hence her novel has generated oddly contradictory responses, from Brewer, who stresses her sympathy with chivalric values, to Sites, who concludes, ‘[i]n *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, Mary Shelley examines chivalry as a corrupting social structure based on hierarchical power-oriented, and strictly gendered code of honor’.²²⁶

I concur with Sites, however, when she states that Mary Shelley shows a general preference for ‘a system that places greater value on bonds of friendship and relationships based on equality’.²²⁷ She also, as in *The Last Man*, seems undecided whether or not withdrawal into a private sphere might be a positive alternative to an engagement with the public world. It is a possibility that, as one might expect, is especially favoured by the novel’s women, by, for example, Elizabeth Woodville, Richard’s mother:

‘Ah! were I a cottager,’ she continued, ‘Though bereft of my husband, I should collect my young ones round me, and forget sorrow. I should toil for them, and they

²²⁴ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 199.

²²⁵ Lord Byron, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: OUP, 1950), 179.

²²⁶ Sites, ‘Chivalry and Utopian Domesticity’, 525.

²²⁷ Sites, ‘Chivalry and Utopian Domesticity’, 525.

would learn to toil for me. How sweet the food my industry procured for them, how hallowed that which their maturer strength would bestow on me! I am the mother of princes. Vain boast! I am childless!' (*PW*, 46)

But even this passage shows that however attractive she finds a life of retirement, she grants that for her it is unavailable. Edmund Plantagenet's unnamed mother had similar ambitions:

When Plantagenet was but ten years old his mother died, and her last request to the father of her boy, founded on a deep knowledge of the world, was that her son might be educated far from the court, nor be drawn from the occupations and happier scenes of private life, to become a hanger-on of princes and nobles. (*PW*, 15)

But eventually Edmund joins the retinue of his father, Richard III, and after the latter's death, he decides that his duty is to vindicate his father's name by joining Richard/ Perkin and helping to promote his cause.

A more complex case is Elizabeth, Henry's Queen, who had hoped that in giving up her private life and joining Henry in his public career she could achieve much good for others, but she finds that 'the name of wife was to her synonymous with that of slave' (*PW*, 31) and that her 'ring is symbol of my servitude; I belong to Henry' (*PW*, 31). She feels that her sacrifice has been futile: 'Neglect was the lightest term that could be applied to the systematized and cold-hearted tyranny of Henry towards his wife. For not only he treated her like an unfavoured child, whose duty it was to obey without a murmur, and to endeavour to please, though sure of being repulsed' (*PW*, 51). She comes to regret marrying Henry rather than the man she really loved, the Earl of Warwick:

You married him you loved, fulfilling thus the best destiny that can be given in this hard world to woman, whose life is merely love. Though he perish in his youth, and you weep for him for ever, hug yourself in the blessed knowledge that your fate is bright as angels; for we reap celestial joys, when love and duty, twined in sisterly embrace, take up their abode together within us. (*PW*, 387)

Her feelings about her husband come to infect her relationship with her children:

‘Sometimes I hate my beautiful children because they are his; sometimes in the dark hour of night, I renounce my nuptial vow, and lend ready, willing ear to fiendish whisperings which borrow Edward’s voice’ (*PW*, 387). Katherine, too, learns that her love for her husband and her feelings for her country are incompatible. She becomes ‘solicitous to leave Scotland---she knew her countrymen; and, ready as she was to give up every exalted aim, and to make her husband’s happiness in the retired quiet of private life, she knew that insult and feud would attend his further tarrying among the Scotch’ (*PW*, 261). Richard is the only male character in the novel to entertain the dream of fulfilment in wholly private life ‘a life of peace and love; a very eternity of sober, waking bliss, to be passed with her he idolized, in the sunny clime of his regretted Spain’ (*PW*, 305). Yet, in this novel, all such dreams prove idle because they are opposed by other feelings of pride, duty, ambition, and responsibility that make them unachievable.

Clearly, Mary Shelley wrote *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* to appeal to the readership that had made Walter Scott the most successful novelist of his age. Although ‘[t]here are no overt allusions to Scott and his work in *Perkin Warbeck* [...] the novel is indebted to him for both its conception and its style’.²²⁸ Yet, despite owing the form of her fiction to Scott, Shelley seems to challenge Scott’s understanding of how the form should operate. On the one hand, she diverges from Scott’s understanding of chivalry. In his ‘Essay on Chivalry’ Scott states that ‘it was peculiar to the institution of Chivalry, to blend military valour with the strongest passions which actuate the human mind, the feelings of devotion and those of love,’ and that ‘the knights of the middle ages fought for God and their ladies’.²²⁹ Shelley’s hero Richard/Perkin has neither religious nor amorous motives for his actions. He seems to act solely to redeem his own honour and to secure the title to which he believes himself entitled: ‘My name is the best in the land; my coming is to claim

²²⁸ Garbin, ‘*The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 4.

²²⁹ Scott, ‘An Essay on Chivalry’, 10.

your aid, to elevate it to its rightful place of pride and honour' (*PW*, 116). His values, then, are never simply individualistic. Of course, Richard has chivalrous feelings that are directed particularly at the two most important women in his life, Monina and Katherine:

hitherto he had given himself up to guarded safety, now he seemed in love with peril, resolved to court her at every opportunity. The risk to which Monina exposed herself, made him obstinate. He would have thought himself untrue to the laws of chivalry, a recreant knight, had he not hastened to protect her; and, more than this, for the inborn impulses of the heart are more peremptory than men's most sacred laws---he loved; and a mother draws not more instinctively her first-born to her bosom, than does the true and passionate lover feel impelled to hazard even life for the sake of her he loves, to shield her from every danger, or to share them gladly with her. (*PW*, 173)

The 'laws of chivalry' to which Perkin adheres seem at this point to be the same laws as those identified by Scott. When Richard later hears Clifford threaten Monina '[e]very drop of blood in his veins was alive with indignation' (*PW*, 205): 'The unchivalrous wrong offered to a woman, that woman his sweet sister-friend, animated him with other feelings: to avenge her, and chastise the arrogant braggart, was his knightly duty, his fervent, impatient wish' (*PW*, 205). Yet these are not the same feelings of duty and honour that make him persist in his cause, even when it seems lost. At such moments his thoughts often turn to the women in his life:

Where were his thoughts? at his journey's goal, or on the ocean sea? If he smiled, it was for Kate; but the tear that glittered on his long eyelashes, spoke of his Spanish maid. Yet it was not the passion of love that he now felt for his childhood companion; it was tenderness, a brother's care, a friend's watchfulness, all that man can feel for woman, unblended with the desire of making her his; but gratitude and distance had so blended and mingled his emotions, that thus addressed, he almost felt as if he had been detected in a crime. (*PW*, 231)

At this point we know that Perkin/Richard claims not to love Monina but to be the loyal husband of Katherine, and yet in this passage his feelings seem unresolved, and in this the passage is true to the whole novel. The relationship with Monina will never be finally resolved. Richard is put to death and Monina vanishes without a trace until years later her

death is reported by a mariner. In Scott's novels, too, the hero often hesitates between two women. In the very first, *Waverley*, for example, the hero must choose between Flora MacIvor and Rose Bradwardine, but when Waverley makes his choice between the two it signals on a personal level his achievement of adult maturity, and on the national level his willingness to accept the historical inevitability of the Hanoverian succession. In marriage to Rose Bradwardine the political and personal themes of the novel are fully resolved, but it is a resolution that Mary Shelley avoids, because her hero, even though he chooses Katherine for his wife, never loses his feelings for Monina, the woman he first loves. The two co-exist, just as for Mary Shelley inconsistent values may often co-exist in the complex realities of both personal and political life.

Perkin/Richard, like several other characters in *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, is much concerned with notions of honour. Again it is a theme that Mary Shelley inherited from her father. As Marilyn Butler points out, in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* 'Falkland's over-valuing of honour and reputation is the characteristic of a type'.²³⁰ Like Scott's Waverley, Falkland has become a lover of chivalry through his love of literature:

From, [the heroic poets of Italy] he imbibed the love of chivalry and romance. He had too much good sense to regret the times of Charlemagne and Arthur. But, while his imagination was purged by a certain infusion of philosophy, he conceived that there was in the manners depicted by these celebrated poets, something to imitate, as well as something to avoid. He believed that nothing was so well calculated to make men delicate, gallant, and humane, as a temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour.²³¹

Birth and honour seem to play the most important part in Godwin's daughter's *Perkin Warbeck*, as well, but her treatment of the theme seems a good deal more nuanced. Godwin uses Falkland, and his defence of his honour by even the most dishonourable means to ridicule Edmund Burke, whom Godwin had once admired 'as a man who had risen by

²³⁰ Marilyn Butler, 'Godwin, Burke, and *Caleb Williams*', *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 32 No 3, 1982 July, 237.

²³¹ Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 10.

merit, as a champion of liberty and a truth-teller'.²³² and also to 'convey[s] the mood of the beleaguered intellectual minority, the frustration, bitterness and fear of marked men, conscious of their own rectitude, who had become singled out as "constructive" traitors, criminals and outcasts' in the decade in which the novel was written.²³³ In Mary Shelley's novel, Richard's strong sense of honour, pride, and duty seems to have its origin in his birth as a royal personage. It first forcibly manifests itself in his early youth: when he is only ten years old and hears about the death of his uncle, Richard III, '[t]he child drew himself up, and his eyes flashed as he said proudly,---"Then I am king of England"' (*PW*, 25). Even the young Duke of York has a very clear idea of his rights as well as his duties. But his sense of himself is familial rather than simply individual. His older brother, Edward, before he dies imposes an obligation on him: 'I should stand in his place; and I should restore my mother's honour, and this he made me swear' (*PW*, 25). In his young manhood Richard is trained in martial combat and eventually becomes a knight. At this period he demonstrates his knightly virtue by displays of reckless courage, as when he asks his cousin, 'Wherefore tarries Sir Edmund, our gentle coz? If he be a true man he shall lead me to danger and glory, and England, ere she own her king, shall be proud of her outcast child' (*PW*, 68). This anticipates the behaviour of the adult Richard who is repeatedly tempted to redeem his honour even at the cost of neglecting his duty to others. When still a young man abroad, Frion seeks him out on behalf of Henry VII, but Richard is wholly unsuspecting of his real purpose. Frion challenges his courage: 'Prudence whispered to Richard that this was dangerous sport; pride told him that it were unfit, nameless, and ushered thus, to appear before the high-born--- but thoughtless youth urged him on, and even as Frion spoke, at quick pace they approached the town-gate' (*PW*, 70). Recklessness and thoughtlessness of this kind are qualities that a future reigning monarch cannot afford.

In his youth Richard is revealed as a dreamer, who does not always have a strong

²³² Butler, 'Godwin, Burke, and *Caleb Williams*', 243.

²³³ Butler, 'Godwin, Burke, and *Caleb Williams*', 252.

sense of reality. On the other hand he is aware of his charisma, a quality that throughout the novel convinces people of his truth by means of his looks. He is entirely uncowed when he is taken prisoner by Frion: ‘With my light spirit and resolved will, I could I doubt not, persuade an armed band to make way for me, or open prison bolts with charming words, though my witchcraft be only that of gentle courtesy, moulding with skilful hand the wax of soft humanity’ (*PW*, 74). This confidence will be shattered more than once during Richard’s life and yet he repeatedly recovers it. One of the earlier physical descriptions of the Duke emphasizes these elements of his character even more clearly: ‘His [lips] were full, a little curled, can we say in pride, or by what more gentle word can we name a feeling of self-elevation and noble purpose, joined to benevolence and sweetness?’ (*PW*, 76). Pride seems the appropriate description of the manner of his introduction of himself to the people of Ireland: ‘My name is the best in the land; my coming is to claim your aid, to elevate it to its rightful place of pride and honour’ (*PW*, 116). In the defence of his own actions Richard/Perkin seems to appeal to notions of pride, right, duty and honour all but interchangeably: ‘What was he? What had he done? He was born king and father of this realm: because he was despoiled of his high rights, was he to abjure his natural duty to her, as her child?’ (*PW*, 251). He is even allowed to claim that he is King by divine right: ‘For me! I do believe that God is on my side, as surely as I know that justice and faith are; and I fear no defeat’ (*PW*, 275). Again and again he uses phrases such as ‘that I may defend my honour, and maintain the right’ (*PW*, 311). Or again, ‘[w]ith my lance and my sword, to the death I will maintain my birth’ (*PW*, 311). Birth, right, pride and honour are ideals that he is never quite prepared to renounce:

‘Thus, my gentle love,’ said Richard, ‘you would have me renounce my birth and name; you desire that we become the scorn of the world, and would be content that so dishonoured, the braggart impostor, and his dame Katherine, should spend their shameful days in an ignominious sloth, misnamed tranquillity. I am a king, lady, though no holy oil nor jewelled crown has touched this head; and such I must prove myself.’ (*PW*, 302)

Even in final defeat, he focuses on the stain on his name: 'he was the defeated, the outcast; there was a clog in his way for ever; a foul taint upon his name' (*PW*, 277). And yet his pride is as likely to express itself in a refusal as in a determination to resent insult: 'Pride, indignation, and heroic resolve sustained the Duke under this insult; but violent, angry emotion was foreign to his disposition, and only kept alive in his bosom at the expense of much suffering' (*PW*, 130). Perkin is a warrior but a feminized version of the warrior, a man of feeling, who is often close to tears and easily moved: 'During the whole day Richard had striven against his own emotions, trying to dispel by pride, and indignation, and enforced fortitude, the softness that invaded his heart and rose to his eyes, blinding them; but the sight of these miserable beings, victims of his right, grew into a tragedy too sad to endure' (*PW*, 254/55). In this, as in much else, his closest relatives are the feminised heroes of Scott's early novels. Frank Osbaldistone from *Rob Roy* would be a characteristic example. His pride of birth makes him sensitive to degradation: 'Seated in the rude gypsy-cart, guided, protected, by the uncouth being into whose hands he had so strangely fallen, Richard for the first time felt the degradation and low fortune to which his aspirations, at variance with his means, made him liable' (*PW*, 189). He speaks of his chivalric virtues at times as if they were a birthright: 'the herald's voice, the clarion's sound, the neigh of steeds, the gallant bearing of the knights, and charmed circle of joyous beauty around, were like a voice from beyond life, speaking of a Paradise he had left,---his own native home' (*PW*, 193). It is a characterization in which Mary Shelley seems concerned to keep the various inconsistent aspects of his character in play simultaneously, making little or no effort to resolve them.

In one of the most interesting scenes of the novel Richard/Perkin asks the Earl of Surrey for support: 'I am an outcast ... the victim of lukewarm faith and ill-nurtured treason: I am weak, my adversary strong. My lord, I will ask nothing of you: I will not fancy that you would revive the ancient bond of union between York and Norfolk; and yet, were it not a worthy act to pull down a base-minded usurper, and seat upon his father's

throne an injured Prince?’ (*PW*, 195). The appeal seems heartfelt and authoritative, but the Earl’s refusal of the request is allowed to seem at least as persuasive:

‘Under favour, it does need,’ replied the Earl; ‘and withal touches mine honour nearly, that it stand clear in this question. My lord, the Roses contended in a long and sanguinary war, and many thousand of our countrymen fell in the sad conflict. The executioner’s axe accomplished what the murderous sword spared, and poor England became a wide, wide grave. The green-wood glade, the cultivated fields, noble castles, and smiling villages were changed to churchyard and tomb: want, famine and hate ravaged the fated land. My lord, I love not Tudor, but I love my country: and now that I see plenty and peace reign over this fair isle, even though Lancaster be their unworthy vicegerent, shall I cast forth these friends of man, to bring back the deadly horrors of unholy civil war? By the God that made me, I cannot! I have a dear wife and lovely children, sisters, friends, and all the sacred ties of humanity, that cling round my heart, and feed it with delight; these I might sacrifice at the call of honour, but the misery I must then endure I will not inflict on others; I will not people my country with widows and orphans; nor spread the plague of death from the eastern to the western sea.’ (*PW*, 196)

Surrey, like Richard/Perkin, appeals to honour and duty, but to contrary effect. His concern for honour and his sense of duty dictates that he should not disturb a nation at peace. He is unwilling to sacrifice the lives of many for the right of one. It is a position that Richard/Perkin will himself adopt before the novel’s conclusion, and a position to which the narrator seems to lend her own authority: ‘Richard would have stood erect and challenged the world to accuse him---God and his right, was his defence. His right! Oh, narrow and selfish was that sentiment that could see, in any right appertaining to one man the excuse for the misery of thousands’ (*PW*, 252). Yet, at this point Surrey’s appeal is unavailing: ‘The Duke of York was not of a temperament to sink supinely before the first obstacles. Lord Surrey’s deep-felt abjuration of war influenced him to sadness, but the usual habit of his mind returned. He had been educated to believe that his honour called on him to maintain his claims. Honour, always a magic word with the good and brave, was then a part of the religion of every pious heart’ (*PW*, 196). Again it is his sense of honour that makes him continue in his cause. Richard never seems able to abandon the thought

that he should gain a kingdom even when his cause seems hopeless: 'Farewell England,' said the royal exile; 'I have no country, save these decks trodden by my friends---where they are, there is my kingdom and my home!' (*PW*, 204). Whereas in Scott's novels the hero slowly but steadily grows into some kind of maturity, Mary's hero, Perkin, simply changes his mind. By the end of the novel he has not really gained wisdom. In Scott character, like history, seems purposive, directed to some end. But Mary Shelley seems doubtful of any such comforting notions. Richard seems unable to learn from his disappointments and experiences. He places complete trust in other people, even his enemies, since he believes that they operate within the same laws of chivalry that he adheres to: 'strange as appearances are, I take Sir John Ramsay's word, and believe that, as a cavalier, he may maintain his cause, nor stain by it his knightly cognizance' (*PW*, 247). When he has the chance to take his revenge on the traitor Clifford he forgoes it: 'Die! oh, no! too many, the good, the great, the true, have died for me; live thou a monument---a mark to tell the world that York can pardon, York can despise---not so base a thing as thee---that were little, but even thy employer' (*PW*, 274). When James IV of Scotland tells Richard that he will have to leave Scotland as a result of the peace talks between England and Scotland Richard's first reaction is a consciousness of injured pride: 'York's blood boiled in his veins; his mind was a chaos of scorn, mortification, and worse anger against himself. The insult inflicted by James before his assembled lords, the bitter speech of Surrey; he almost feared that he deserved the one, while he disdained to resent the other; and both held him silent' (*PW*, 257/58). A little later a more elaborate passage even more intensively shows Richard's feelings at his sudden dismissal:

For the first time in his life perhaps, pride conquered every other feeling; for reproach had been more *friendly*, than the spirit that impelled him, with a placid voice, and a glance of haughty condescension, to reply:---'Now that your Majesty dismisses me, I find it fittest season to thank you heartily for your many favours. That you deny me to the suit of your new ally, and send me forth scaithless from your kingdom, is the very least of these. Shall I forget that, when, a wanderer and a stranger, I came hither, you were a brother to me? That when an outcast from the world, Scotland became a home of smiles, and its King my dearest friend? These

are lesser favours; for your love was of more value to me than your power, though you used it for my benefit; and, when you gave me the Lady Katherine, I incurred such a debt of gratitude, that it were uncanceled, though you cast me, bound hand and foot, at Tudor's footstool. (*PW*, 264)

Here Richard distinguishes between James the monarch and James the friend: 'the King of Scotland, moved by strong state-necessity is no longer the ally of the disinherited orphan of Edward the Fourth: but James is Richard's friend' (*PW*, 265). This is a novel that everywhere recognizes that people have not single but fractured identities. There are moments in which the novel does seem to trace Richard/Perkin's slow progress towards maturity, as when Desmond meets him again after a long separation:

Lord Desmond arrived---he was struck by the improvement in York's manner, still ingenuous and open-hearted: he was more dignified, more confident in himself than before---the husband of Katherine also acquired consideration; as an adventurous boy, he might be used according to the commodity of the hour---now he had place-- - station in the world, and Desmond paid him greater deference, almost unawares. (*PW*, 279)

But Richard never loses his capacity to respond to events erratically, shifting unpredictably from one position to another.

Richard does seem as the novel proceeds increasingly emphatic in his protestations that he is unwilling to secure his own title to the throne at the expense of the common people. He tells King James IV of Scotland, 'recall your men; bid them spare my people; let not the blood of my subjects plead against my right; rather would I pine in exile for ever, than occasion the slaughter and misery of my countrymen, my children' (*PW*, 256). He has a feminine capacity to be moved by the cost of battle: 'Oh, my stony and hard-frozen heart!' he cried, 'which breakest not to see the loss and slaughter of so many of thy natural-born subjects and vassals!' (*PW*, 255). He asks: 'Oh, what am I, King of Scotland, that I am to be made the curse and scourge of my own people? The name of Richard is the bye-word of hate and terror, there, where I seek for blessings and filial love. You know not

the mischief your fierce Borderers achieve' (*PW*, 256). An old monk, the educator of Edward Plantagenet, confirms Richard's fears when he predicts: 'Not one, oh! not one Englishman will fall by his brother's hand, for not one will fight for that base deceit, the ill-nurtured Perkin, to whom God in his wrath has given such show of right as brings the Scot upon us' (*PW*, 253). Richard concludes that he 'would rather be a cotter on your wild Highlands, than buy the sovereignty of my fair England by the blood of her inhabitants' (*PW*, 257). He asks Katherine whether she would be prepared to give up the throne for a humble life:

'Wilt thou, dear lady of my heart, descend from thy lofty state, and accept an errant knight, instead of a sceptered king, for thy mate? Alas! sweet Kate, if thou wilt not, I may never see thee more: for not thus, oh not thus, my God, will Richard win a kingdom! Poor England bleeds: our over-zealous cousin has pierced her with dismal wounds; and thou wouldst in thy gentleness shed a thousand tears, hadst thou beheld the misery that even now, grim and ghastly, floats before my sight. What am I, that I should be the parent of evil merely? Oh, my mother, my too kind friends, why did ye not conceal me from myself? Teaching me lessons of humbleness, rearing me as a peasant, consigning me to a cloister, my injuries would have died with me; and the good, the brave, the innocent, who have perished for me, or through me, had been spared!' (*PW*, 258)

But even after this he assures his wife that 'he was not so far reduced to beg a refuge at the limits of civilization; still he had his sword, his cause, his friends' (*PW*, 260), and still later he shows himself willing to countenance that others should die in the defence of his cause:

'That one other life should be wasted for me,' replied Richard fervently, 'is my saddest thought. I fear it must be so; some few lives, each as dear to him that spends it, as is the life-blood to our own hearts. I can say no more. I have a secret purpose, I confess, in all I do. To accomplish it---and I do believe it to be a just one---I must strike one blow; nor fail.' (*PW*, 300)

He is prepared that these 'few lives' should be lost even though he has finally abandoned his claim to the throne, because he still remains stubbornly attached to the defence of his own honour. He explains to Katherine:

one only thing I prize, not as thy equal, but as that without which, I were a casket not even worthy to encase this jewel of the earth---my honour [...] dear is it to me, since without it I would not partake your home of love---an home, more glorious and more blessed than the throne of the universe. It is for that I now fight, Katherine; not for a kingdom. (*PW*, 303)

His honour is worth more than all the kingdoms in the world, it seems; even more important than Katherine and their love. Even when he recognizes that his cause is hopeless he is determined to '[d]ie, in arms and at liberty' (*PW*, 324) rather than to live on in shame or disgrace: 'I feel sure of success. I feel, that in giving up every prospect of acquiring my birth-right, I make the due oblation to fortune, and that she will bestow the rest---that rest is to rescue my name from the foul slur Henry has cast on it' (*PW*, 303).

He makes a last attempt to reconcile his care for his followers with his ambition to be King when he challenges Henry to single combat. He adds, 'If you deny my just demands, be the blood spilt in defence of my honour on your head; England ravaged, your towns destroyed, your realm subject to all the calamities of war' (*PW*, 311). This seems unrealistic since Henry's forces are so much stronger, and also an unpersuasive attempt to absolve himself of responsibility for bloodshed. To almost the very end of the novel Richard seems unsure whether his chief ambition is to become King or whether 'to send [his followers] back skaitless to their own homes, was his chief desire, even to the buying of their safety with his own downfall' (*PW*, 315).

Richard is a military leader who is credited with 'a quick sympathy with his species, and a reverence for all that bore the shape of man'. When he acknowledges the futility of his enterprise he tries to reconcile these discordant identities by determining '[t]o lead his troops forth, and then to redeem them at Henry's hand, by the conditionless surrender of himself.' This 'was the thought, child of despair and self-devotion, that still struggling with the affections and weaknesses of his nature, presented itself, not yet full fledged, but about to become so' (*PW*, 316). The construction of that sentence in itself offers strong evidence of Mary Shelley's anxiety that such struggles should never be

finally resolved. He 'rode forward, fostering newly-awakened hope; glad in the belief that while he saved all who depended on him, he would not prove a mere victim led in tame submission, an unrighteous sacrifice to the Evil Spirit of the World' (*PW*, 318). But only a few pages later he decides that 'liberty in the free forest seemed worth more than a kingdom' (*PW*, 322). In the end, his only resource seems to be to surrender himself to circumstance: 'Darkest thoughts thronged his mind; loss of honour, desertion of friends, the fate of his poor men: he was to have devoted himself to them, but a stream, driven by a thundering avalanche from its course, had as much power as he to oppose the circumstances that had brought him from his camp near Taunton, to this secluded spot' (*PW*, 326). Even at this point he cannot forget that '[f]rom his early childhood he had been nurtured in the idea that it was his first, chief duty to regain his kingdom' (*PW*, 337). At the very end he realizes that 'his story was a fable, his name a jeer; he no longer, so it seemed, existed; for the appellation of Duke of York was to be lost and merged in the disgraceful misnomer affixed to him by the Usurper' (*PW*, 338). He ends, not as the hero of a Scott novel does, by securing his own identity, but by realizing that he has achieved no identity to secure. He surrenders to Henry in order to save the lives of his followers, and is taken prisoner. His fate, he realizes, is that '[h]e must forego himself; grow an impostor in his own eyes; take on him the shameful name of Perkin: all which native honour, and memory of his Princess bride, made trebly stinging' (*PW*, 341). In his imprisonment the ideal of liberty seems to be replaced by the ideal of freedom: 'On his poor heart, sick of captivity and enforced obedience, the sweet word liberty hung as a spell: every bird and tiny fly he had envied as being free; how much more things more powerful, the chainless destructions of nature' (*PW*, 351). So this is what he now sets his mind to. There is no longer any need to save his honour: he lost that when he surrendered and accepted his designation as an impostor to save his men. But liberty he still might regain as any weapon 'cannot harm one whom God calls to freedom' (*PW*, 351). Again, Richard does not remain in the state of mind he arrived at when he resolved to become Henry's prisoner. Instead,

‘[h]is exulting heart, his light, glad spirit told him that he was free; if for a few minutes only, he would joyfully purchase with his life those few minutes' emancipation from his frightful thralldom’ (*PW*, 352). Suddenly, only a few minutes of freedom seem worth a life that earlier was so precious that it took him a long time to resolve to risk it in order to save his allies. Now, even ‘if he wandered to the wide fields, and died of hunger there, it were bliss enough to see the sky “unclouded by his dungeon roof;” to behold the woods, the flowers, and the dancing waves; nor be mocked with man’s shape, when those who wore it had sold man’s dearest privilege---that of allowing his actions to wait upon the free impulses of his heart’ (*PW*, 352). But he regains his freedom only to lose it again, stands trial, and at last suffers execution. His death ends rather than completes his life, for Mary Shelley lacks Scott’s confidence that the processes of history can confer meaning and value on the individual lives through which they work themselves out.

3. 4. Women and Chivalry

The chivalric code may exalt women but it also renders them passive, and yet, for Brewer, Monina ‘personifies chivalric selflessness’.²³⁴ Mary Shelley uses this invented character to introduce into the novel a woman who is strong, independent and competent, and yet she is motivated throughout by her devotion to a man, Richard/Perkin. Her devotion first displays itself when she tends his wounds after he is badly hurt in a duel in Spain: ‘she almost lamented when he no longer needed her undivided attention: the hours she gave to repose came like beggars following in a procession of crowned heads; they were no longer exalted by being devoted to him’ (*PW*, 99). All through the novel, ‘The most distant prospect of serving her beloved friend was hailed by her with romantic ardour’ (*PW*, 141). The reader expects that she will become a devoted wife, just like Perdita in *The Last Man*. Yet she remains unmarried and independent, moving about freely, and actively engages herself in

²³⁴ Brewer, ‘William Godwin, Chivalry, and Mary Shelley’s *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*’, 194.

garnering political support for Richard's cause, and yet Richard remains throughout 'the idol of her thoughts' (*PW*, 142). She finds in serving Richard the identity that some of her countrywomen have found in religious mission, and for her the two are closely connected: 'Our Lady and my cause shall protect me, while I adventure life fearlessly for its sake!' (*PW*, 142). Her dedication is unaffected and may even be secured by her recognition 'that he was a prince, and she the daughter of a Spanish mariner, [which] forbade their union' (*PW*, 145). When Richard marries, Monina does not feel herself the rival of his wife. The relationship with Richard always seems to retain an erotic excitement – 'Monina did not wonder that her bosom throbbed wildly, as she remained in expectation of seeing her childhood's playfellow, from whom she had been so long absent. Nor did she check her emotion of intense pleasure when she saw him, and heard him in her native Spanish utter expressions of glad delight at so unexpectedly beholding her' (*PW*, 165) – but it is an eroticism that seems fully sublimated into a devotion to the cause. Richard feels an obligation to protect her. When 'a rude companion of the crew made some rough jest on her sobriety [,] Richard's face lighted up with anger' (*PW*, 187). Yet, Monina is the last person really to need his protection as she seems to be well able to look out for herself. Monina seems often enough to conform to a tired stereotype: 'what a wondrous creation woman was--- weak, frail, complaining when she suffers for herself; heroic fortitude and untired self-devotion are hers, when she sacrifices herself for him she loves' (*PW*, 190). She and her father seem modelled on Rebecca and Isaac in Scott's *Ivanhoe*, and yet there is a crucial difference. Rebecca's only active role is as *Ivanhoe*'s nurse. When she is tied to the stake and threatened with burning she is very emphatically a passive victim who must await *Ivanhoe*'s rescue. Monina, by contrast, repeatedly reveals herself to be a courageous, strong, competent woman, who actively functions as a spy, and a messenger, she even manages to raise an admittedly ill-equipped army to support Richard's cause. She seems entirely without Richard's feminine scruples: 'He has dared too little, when he had power:

at the worst, even now, let him dare all, and triumph' (*PW*, 294). Even when he is imprisoned she remains an energetically active supporter:

Monina first awoke her to the truth. Monina, who had been to Brussels, to consult with the Duchess Margaret and Lady Brampton, and who came back full of projects for her friend's escape, heard with amazement and scorn the false lures held out by Henry; she impatiently put aside every inducement for delay, and with rash, but determined zeal, framed many a scheme for communicating with him, and contriving means for his flight. (*PW*, 347/48)

She seems throughout the novel a more complete embodiment of the chivalric ideal than does Richard himself.

For Mary Shelley 'historical fiction became the means through which [she] could express her political anxiety and in this [...] she found a mentor in Scott, despite Scott's quite different politics.'²³⁵ Despite the fact that Shelley and Scott agree 'on the ethical-pedagogical work that fiction can do *as* fiction'²³⁶, Mary Shelley's notion of the historical novel differs widely from Scott's. When he represents the historical crises within which his novels are placed, Scott assumes the historian's disinterestedness. As Anderson notes, '[i]t needs to be emphasised that his background as a historian was thoroughly professional'.²³⁷ Scott is anxious to grant to each side of a historical conflict its share of virtue, and he tends to mourn those causes that are defeated even when he recognizes the historical necessity of that defeat. Scott thought it 'inadvisable for the novelist to use events already fully described by a well-known historian, since any departure from well-established truth would have a disagreeable effect'.²³⁸ In all these respects Mary Shelley reverses Scott's practice. In presenting the seemingly well-established history of Perkin Warbeck, she offers an unashamedly partisan account of history in which she does not conceal her

²³⁵ Garbin, '*The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*', 2

²³⁶ Deidre Lynch, 'Historical Novelist', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145.

²³⁷ James Anderson, *Sir Walter Scott and History: With Other Papers* (Edinburgh: The Edna Press Ltd., 1981), 2.

²³⁸ Anderson, *Sir Walter Scott and History*, 27/28.

loathing for Henry VII or her admiration of Perkin Warbeck's many virtues. She counters Scott's version of disinterested history with a feminised version, in which the heart is allowed almost absolute authority over the head,²³⁹ in which passionate sympathies and antipathies are, or seem to be, indulged at the expense of the calm exercise of historical judgement on which Scott rests his own claims to novelistic authority. As Lynch observes, 'The most audacious move Shelley makes in *Perkin Warbeck*' is to build on 'Gothic antecedents: to dissociate the "truth" of Tudor history from all the official modes of collective memory'.²⁴⁰ Mary Shelley was far more sympathetic to the possibility that Byron had raised in his play, *Marino Faliero*, that history was simply the version of the truth that had contrived successfully to impose itself on other, equally possible versions. In other words, when Henry VII defeated Richard III in the Battle of Bosworth Field, he won not only a kingdom but the power to write the history of the battle and of his own reign. For Mary Shelley, history only pretends to be impartial and disinterested: in fact it is an account of the past as seen by the winning side. Furthermore, unlike her father or husband, who both strongly believe in human perfectibility, Mary Shelley accepts man's inability to learn from the past: 'the wise have taught, the good suffered for us; we are still the same' (*PW*, 275). As Sites puts it, 'For Mary Shelley [...] the importance of history is not located in bare facts, but in creative efforts of the author, whose setting forth of the feelings and motives of historical actors has the capacity to effect readers' moral and political edification.'²⁴¹

In *Perkin Warbeck* Mary Shelley rewrites the Romantic historical novel as it had been fashioned by Scott in order to develop her own feminine version of the genre. But she also explicitly criticises some aspects of romanticism. The male version of the Romantic imagination seems to be categorised as at once delusive and destructive: 'The creative

²³⁹ In *Perkin Warbeck* Katherine says: 'Remember I am a woman, with a woman's tutelage in my early years, a woman's education in the world, which is that of the heart---alas! for us---not of the head.'

²⁴⁰ Lynch, 'Historical Novelist', 146.

²⁴¹ Sites, 'Chivalry and Utopian Domesticity', 525.

faculty of man's soul---which, animating Richard, made him see victory in defeat, success and glory in the dark, the tortuous, the thorny path, which it was his destiny to walk from the cradle to the tomb' (*PW*, 275). She also seems to question the meliorism that her father and husband held in common. History displays for her a pattern of repetition rather than a pattern of progress.

3. 5. Autobiographical Elements in *Perkin Warbeck*: The Vindication of a Husband and a Wife

Mary Shelley represents in *Perkin Warbeck* many of the qualities that she ascribed to her husband: '[w]herever he saw the human countenance, he beheld a fellow-creature; and, duped a thousand times, and a thousand times deceived, "still he must love"' (*PW*, 344). And yet in *Perkin Warbeck*, unlike in *The Last Man*, the moral centre seems most often to be located in the women; in Jane Shore, living out her life as the despised mistress of a long dead King, in Richard's sister, Elizabeth of York, condemned to a loveless, dynastic marriage to Henry Tudor, her brother's persecutor, and most of all in the two women who love Richard/Perkin, Monina, and Lady Katherine Gordon. This is necessarily so in a novel, that for all the value that it recognizes in the masculine warrior virtues, in the end subordinates them to more traditionally feminine virtues of selflessness and loyalty.

In the character of Richard/Perkin, Mary Shelley seems intent once again on vindicating the reputation of a culminated male figure, behind whom, as in all such figures in her novels, the presence of her late husband seems all too visible. It is as if, in forbidding her to write her husband's biography, the poet's father, Sir Timothy Shelley, had condemned her to the task of producing a disguised or displaced biography in every book that she wrote. But in the final pages of *Perkin Warbeck*, she diverts her attention from Perkin to Katherine, his wife. The final chapter takes place much later than Perkin's execution and focuses not on the fate of Perkin but of his surviving wife. In this final chapter, Mary Shelley is interested not in vindicating the reputation of the husband but of

the wife, and in a novel that seems to offer such a single-minded celebration of the traditional wifely virtues, and in particular of a wife's capacity to devote herself utterly, selflessly to her husband, Katherine's reputation seems to offer unusually difficult material to work with. After the death of her husband, the historical Katherine did not long remain a grieving widow. She accepted a pension from her husband's hated murderer, Henry VII, and almost more disturbingly she married one after the other no less than three more husbands.²⁴² Mary Shelley prefixes her final chapter with a note:

I do not know how far these concluding pages may be deemed superfluous: the character of the Lady Katherine Gordon is a favourite of mine, and yet many will be inclined to censure her abode in Henry VII's court, and other acts of her after life. I desired therefore that she should speak for herself, and show her conduct, subsequent to her husband's death, was in accordance with the devotion and fidelity with which she attended his fortunes during his life. (*PW*, n395)

It seems a bold project. Mary Shelley undertakes to represent that subsequent history, those other relationships, as confirming rather than compromising her single-minded devotion to her husband. Not by accident, Mary Shelley takes her argument from an essay by her husband that she had herself been the first to publish, his 'Essay on Love.' In that essay P. B. Shelley argues that humankind is defined not by an ability to love but by a need to love, a need so potent that even in the absence of another human being we would love whatever inanimate objects were available to us:

Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they sympathize not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, the waters, and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring, in the blue air, there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them, which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul, awaken the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone. Sterne says that if he were in a desert he would love some cypress. So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.²⁴³

²⁴² namely James Strangeways, Sir Matthew Cradock, and Christopher Ashton.

²⁴³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *On Love, The Major Works* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 632.

This is all but identical to the argument that Katherine is allowed to voice in the novel's final chapter. Since Perkin's death her life has gone on. 'Meanwhile' she insists 'I am human, and human affections are the native, luxuriant growth of a heart, whose weakness it is, too eagerly, and too fondly, to seek objects on whom to expend its yearnings' (*PW*, 399). It was through their shared capacity for human affection that she and her late husband were united, so that her continuing to feel that capacity is no betrayal but a proper tribute to his memory. 'Where I see suffering,' Katherine argues, 'I must bring my mite for its relief' (*PW*, 400). But 'we are not deities to bestow in impassive benevolence. We give because we love' (*PW*, 400). It is our continuing capacity to love that ensures that we can retain those impulses to active generosity that Mary Shelley, like her husband, valued most in human beings. The speech is Katherine's self-vindication, but it is a self-vindication that Mary Shelley seems to expect that her readers will also apply to herself. Mary Shelley wrote *The Last Man* in 1824-5, very soon after she was widowed at a point where it seemed that all her life to come, like Lionel Verney's in that novel, would remain frozen in a single attitude of inconsolable grief. But since then life had gone on. In Paris she had met and been courted by the glamorous young French writer, Prosper Mérimée. In England she had been much taken by the equally glamorous and unhappily married young writer, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and by the American Washington Irving. By 1830, when *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* was published, she had begun to contemplate the possibility, though in the event it never materialized, that she might one day re-marry. In the last chapter of her novel, she speaks for Katherine and also for herself and all those like her, widows condemned by social pressures to believe that they can only demonstrate their continuing loyalty to their dead husbands by refusing all those human impulses that had made it possible for them to love their husbands in the first place. *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* is in the end a more important novel for its vindication of wives than of husbands,

and in particular for its vindication of the most disadvantaged group amongst them, the widows.

Lisa Hopkins contends that '[t]he end of *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* is primarily concerned with the guilt of the survivor'.²⁴⁴ Katherine's clearly suggests a strong sense of loss: "Ah! would that we had all died in that hour," cried Katherine, "why, when the ungrateful world lost him, did not all the good and true die also, so that they might no longer suffer!"' (*PW*, 396). This clearly reflects Shelley's own feelings after her husband's death, and yet Katherine seems at least as conscious of the world's loss as her own. In the end, perhaps, it is not so much 'the guilt of the survivor' that Katherine feels but the pressure of society: She lives at Henry's court and is as dependent on his financial support as was Mary Shelley on the support of her tight-fisted father-in-law. In both cases, the widows were dependent on the most unrelenting enemies of their husbands.²⁴⁵ Society, they both recognize, will blame them for fraternizing with the enemy. Katherine, and through her Mary, concedes, 'I will not blame you for the false judgement you pass on me' (*PW*, 398), but she does attempt a self-justification. The sole purpose of her remaining with Henry is 'to endeavour to foster the many virtues nature has implanted in the noble mind of Prince Arthur [...] I am fulfilling, methinks a task grateful in the eyes of Richard, thus doing my part to bestow on the England he loved, a sovereign who will repair the usurper's crimes and bestow happiness on the realm' (*PW*, 399/400). In her eyes, Katherine is continuing in this way her husband's work just as Mary Shelley herself could justify her concessions to her father-in-law's demands by asserting her duty of care to her son. Both transfer the love they had for their partner in life to the next generation. In Mary Shelley's case what Katherine says rings true: '[w]here I see suffering, there I must bring my mite for its relief' (*PW*, 400). Not only did she care for her only surviving child, she also supported her father who very often was in debt and for some time she lived with and

²⁴⁴ Hopkins, 'The Self and the Monstrous', 271.

²⁴⁵ Sunstein, *Mary Shelley*, 249, 261.

cared for Jane Williams as well. In this final quotation, Katherine again could be easily replaced by Mary: ‘My passions, my susceptible imagination, my faltering dependence on others, my clinging to the sense of joy- this makes an integral part of Katherine, or the worst part of her. [...] I must love and be loved. I must feel that my dear and chosen friends are happier through me’ (*PW*, 400). Deprived of her husband Mary Shelley preferred to remain unmarried. This final chapter of *Perkin Warbeck* gives us all the reasons why: she is still devoted to her husband, whom she believes to be an outstanding person among humanity and whom she thinks to be above all others. So instead of searching for another companion who is doomed not to fulfil her expectations, she prefers to remain in a circle of family and friends and devote her happiness and life to them.

Katherine concludes: “‘Years have passed since then. If grief kill us not, we kill it. Not that I cease to grieve; for each hour, revealing to me how excelling and matchless the being was, who once was mine, but renews the pang with which I deplore my alien state upon earth’ (*PW*, 399). In this too we may feel that the character speaks for the author. Katherine asserts at once that she has killed her grief and that she still grieves. It is a conclusion quite different from *The Last Man*, and yet it seems at once very personal and a conclusion that, in its irresolution, is entirely appropriate to *Perkin Warbeck*.

3. 6. Conclusion

The novel gives a wide variety of possible interpretations ranging from discussions of chivalry, honour, the potential of a feminized version of the historical novel as invented by Sir Walter Scott over biographical readings to personal apologies. Most interestingly however, the novel is engaged not so much in rehearsing the ideological commitments that had been shared by Mary Shelley’s father, her mother and her husband, but in establishing the proper limits of ideology. It is a novel that asks how much human pain and suffering

political principles are worth, and it does not pretend that this is a question that allows any easy answers.

4. *Lodore*

Lodore, like all of the novels that Mary Shelley wrote after *Frankenstein*, has failed to win wide critical recognition. The muted responses of Mary Poovey and Anne Mellor are representative. Most of Mary Shelley's later novels are considered by modern critics inferior in style and content to her earlier novels, and especially to *Frankenstein*. So, too, is *Lodore*. As Sharon Jowell notes, critics tend to 'see the late novels fulfilling one of two agendas, either as a vehicle of atonement for past transgressions or a means of satisfying her financial needs by pleasing both the book-buying public and Sir Timothy Shelley'.²⁴⁶ And yet *Lodore*, when it was first published, was more warmly received than any of Shelley's novels with the single exception of *Frankenstein*.

I agree with a number of modern critics that one of Shelley's principal concerns in the later novels is with vindicating the characters of those who had been close to her, and indeed with vindicating her own character. Yet, in *Lodore*, I feel, that this element finally seems less important than it is in *The Last Man* or *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*. In this novel, other ideas seem more important to Mary Shelley than an obligation to redeem the reputations of those she had loved. In recent years, *Lodore* has for the first time been the subject of detailed critical readings, and these have identified its key themes as parent-child relationships, and education, and in particular the most appropriate education for women. I would claim that it is a novel with a particular focus on the idea of education.

In the introduction to her edition of the novel Lisa Vargo 'wish[es] to present an interpretation of *Lodore* that is in keeping with Betty Bennett's belief that Shelley remained true to the ideals she shared with her parents and her husband'. For her, the novel

²⁴⁶ Sharon L. Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers: The Weak, The Absent, and the Silent in *Lodore* and *Falkner*', *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1997, 298.

is primarily concerned with the notion of ‘legacy’. I would like to take her argument a step further.²⁴⁷ Certainly Mary Shelley was strongly influenced by her parents especially where education is concerned. Her parents’ plentiful writings on the topic had a decisive impact on her. However, as I have argued earlier, Mary Shelley does not simply adopt her parents’ views. She develops them, and in some instances challenges them. In the words of Melissa Sites, Mary Shelley is concerned with ‘critically adapting and expanding upon the radical theories of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and revising the Romantic ideals, including the ideal of universal Promethean love, exemplified in the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley’.²⁴⁸

In *Lodore*, I will argue, Mary Shelley is interested in using the novel to investigate her parents’ educational ideas and those of their contemporaries. She explores, for example, the educational ideas that Eliza Fenwick had incorporated in *Secresy*, and Amelia Opie in *Adeline Mowbray* in order to expose their weaknesses. It is by way of a sceptical testing of the ideas of her parents’ generation that she arrives at her own conclusions. It follows from this that I will argue against ‘the tendency [...] to classify *Lodore* and *Falkner* as Victorian novels that stress docile female protagonists and typical love-marriage plots’.²⁴⁹ It is of course plain that *Lodore* is an attempt by Mary Shelley to write a ‘silver-fork novel’, that is, a novel of fashionable life. The silver-fork novel as written by novelists such as Edward Bulwer, Catherine Gore and Benjamin Disraeli earned an unusual popularity in the 1820s and 1830s presumably by offering its middle-class readers a privileged glimpse into the lives of their social superiors. As Fiona Stafford explains, ‘The desire to conform to the popular taste of the day, however, was not merely a question of following fashion or courting respectability. The extreme difficulty that beset the contemporary book trade resulted in great pressure being put on writers to produce

²⁴⁷ Vargo, ‘Introduction’, Mary Shelley, *Lodore* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), 11, 38.

²⁴⁸ Melissa Sites, ‘Re/membering Home: Utopian Domesticity in Mary Shelley’s *Lodore*’, 81.

²⁴⁹ Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers’, 300.

something saleable in order to be published at all.²⁵⁰ In order to be read at all, indeed in order to find a publisher, Shelley had to make use of a popular genre. But, as Jane Blumberg argues, *Lodore* transcends the limited possibilities of the 'genre' within which it is written.²⁵¹ In any case it may be that the silver-fork novel is not so trivial as literary historians have tended to suggest. Its most successful exponent, Edward Bulwer, claimed for it an unusual social importance:

Few writers ever produced so great an effect on the political spirit of their generation as some of these novelists, who, without any other merit, unconsciously exposed the falsehood, the hypocrisy, the arrogant and vulgar insolence of patrician life.²⁵²

This might be explained as special pleading, but two recent critics have taken Bulwer's suggestion seriously.²⁵³ Neither do I agree with Carolyn Williams that the novel represents 'Shelley's retreat into the safety of propriety in the face of social and financial pressure' or her 'ideological capitulation'.²⁵⁴ I agree rather with Lisa Vargo that Shelley's 'novels and her outlook during the 1830s have been misread as reinforcing Victorian cultural stereotypes, rather than as advancing a critique from within them'. I will argue with Vargo that 'Mary Shelley uses the opportunity to infuse popular fiction with a more sustained social and political critique' and that 'Shelley was aware of the power of popular genres to convey political ideas,' although it may well be that Vargo underestimates the extent to which the popular tradition within which Shelley chooses to write is itself capable of mounting a searching social criticism.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁰ Fiona Stafford, 'Lodore: a Tale of the Present Time?', *Mary Shelley's Fiction: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (New York: Macmillan; St. Martin's, 2000), 183.

²⁵¹ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels*, 219.

²⁵² Edward Bulwer, *England and the English* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1834), 253.

²⁵³ See Cheryl A. Wilson, *Fashioning the Silver-Fork Novel* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), and Edward Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel in the Age of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁵⁴ Nicholas M. Williams, 'Angelic Realism: Domestic Idealization in Mary Shelley's *Lodore*', *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 39 No. 4, 2007 Winter, 379, 399.

²⁵⁵ Vargo, 'Lodore and the "Novel of Society"', *Women's Writing*, Vol. 6 No. 3, 1999, 427, 428.

In *Lodore* almost every character is designed to illuminate the novel's educational theme. Shelley is not interested in writing an updated version of Rousseau's *Émile*. She is not concerned with describing a model education. Indeed almost all the characters suffer because of the imperfect education that has been given them. As in the earlier *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, she offers the reader various possibilities, only to leave it undecided as to which educational theory she prefers. Yet unlike in *Perkin Warbeck* she does seem by the end of the novel to have reached a conclusion, even if the conclusion is remarkably open-ended. Every type of education is acceptable if it ends in an education of the self. This is particularly clear in the cases of Cornelia Lodore and her daughter Ethel who by the end of the novel have both managed to overcome the deficiencies of their respective educations and have learned to speak as well as act for themselves. The proper end of education is the achievement of moral autonomy, not the production of a particular kind of character.

4. 1. Educational Writing

Writings on conduct and education have a long history. In the Old Testament the Ten Commandments, giving clear guidelines on godly behaviour, constitute a kind of conduct manual. In the following centuries in the Western world, numerous works discuss and modify these teachings and the wisdom of the New Testament. By the sixteenth century a number of conduct books were available which offered men and women guidance on their respective roles before and during marriage. These clearly define four female roles: daughter, wife, mother and widow. By the seventeenth century Puritan advice books, again directed towards men as well as women, tended to place stronger emphasis on a woman's subordination, a posture for which Biblical authority was claimed. Possibly the first conduct book solely aimed at the education of girls and women is Richard Brathwaite's *The English Gentlewoman* (1631). It is the first book of its kind that is not simply a

marriage manual: the book was designed for upper-class women who might be expected to take part in a social life wider than the domestic. The highest virtue, according to Braithwaite, was civility which required appropriate education: ‘her education hath so enabled her as shee can converse with you of all places, deliver her judgment conceivingly of most persons, and discourse most delightfully of all fashions’.²⁵⁶ Girls were not, however, supposed to become too learned, as learning would ruin their distinctive virtues. By the end of the seventeenth century not only men, but also women were writing on the topic of female education. However, in most cases the women writers would still echo their male counterparts in suggesting that females are subordinate and should behave accordingly. Only by the late eighteenth century did women writers finally begin to contradict the male authors who tried to create perfect, docile and submissive female partners for themselves and other men. Catherine Macaulay in her *Letters on Education* (1790) claims that the only difference between the sexes is physical and that the education of girls, as it was currently constituted, was calculated to debilitate mind and body. Instead, she insists on a restructuring of all education and the introduction of a more rational education for women. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) fiercely attacks Rousseau’s ideas on female education as promoted in book 5 of *Émile* (1762). Here as well as in her earlier *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) she promoted a less ‘sexual’ education for women. Others, like Hester Chapone, were of a similar mind. Women should, according to these female writers, be given the same educational opportunities as men in order to become full citizens with legal and political responsibilities. Of course, both Wollstonecraft and Macaulay were felt to have lived scandalous private lives and the outrage provoked by these lives affected the reaction to their progressive ideas.

By the time Mary Shelley was writing *Lodore*, hundreds of books on education and female education in particular had been written, so with this novel she does not open a

²⁵⁶ Richard Braithwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* (London: B. Alsop and T. Faucet, 1631), 4.

wholly new topic, she rather revisits an old one, one that was dear to her through the memory of her mother Mary Wollstonecraft. And yet, though many critics suggest that Mary Shelley, in her own writings, echoes the thoughts, ideas and idealism of her parents' generation, there is more to the matter than this. In *Lodore*, she revisits the discussion of the appropriate education of a young woman through a number of characters. I will discuss this in detail below.

4. 2. Education in *Lodore*

It is possibly true that, as Melissa Sites argues, Mary 'Shelley follows Wollstonecraft in believing in a woman's right to become a fully enfranchised citizen by becoming educated'.²⁵⁷ But what kind of education does a woman require to achieve this aim? Mary Shelley was fascinated by the possibilities that different approaches to education offered for the development of different personalities as early as in 1816. When she wrote *Frankenstein*, she not only gave the reader a detailed description of the monster's self-education which consisted in his close observation and imitation of the De Lacey family and in his reading of Plutarch's *Lives*, *Paradise Lost* and *The Sorrows of Werter*, all of which he reads as true histories, she also introduces us to the education of the monster's creator Victor Frankenstein. Victor describes the early education which he shared with his cousin Elizabeth as follows:

Our studies were never forced; and by some means we always had an end placed in view, which excited us to ardour in the prosecution of them. It was by this method, and not by emulation, that we were urged to application. [...] We learned Latin and English, that we might read the writings in those languages; and so far from study being made odious to us through punishment, we loved application, and our amusements would have been the labours of other children. Perhaps we did not read so many books, or learn languages so quickly, as those who are disciplined according to the ordinary methods; but what we learned was impressed the more deeply on our memories. (*Frankenstein*, 1818, 21)

²⁵⁷ Sites, 'Re/membering Home: Utopian Domesticity in Mary Shelley's *Lodore*', 84.

The approach to education suggested here promotes a learning environment which does not use punishment in order to achieve its goals but rather tries to create in the student a willingness to learn, allowing some freedom in what the student chooses to learn. It is not by accident that an educational theory of this or any other sort should find its way into Mary Shelley's very first novel. Her father formulates a similar approach in his *Enquirer* essays and actively tried to abide by this ideal when educating his orphaned second-cousin Thomas Cooper as well as his own children and step-children afterwards.²⁵⁸ The ideas of education do, however, not end here in *Frankenstein*. There is also the education of the Arabian girl Safie, which the creature eavesdroppingly uses in order to educate himself. Safie, as her name suggests, seems to be Mary Shelley's first comment on Rousseau's Sofie in *Émile*. Safie is an eager student, trying to improve herself in order to become less dependent on others and to be able to communicate in a foreign country without having to rely on anybody. In this she is the complete opposite of Rousseau's Sofie, who is supposed to be well versed in all skills necessarily female such as housekeeping, needlework, singing, dancing, looking pretty and representative of their parentage and being able to keep a conversation going, no matter who their opposite might be. At the same time she is not supposed to develop a sense of independence or a mind that is allowed to think for itself. She is supposed to remain dependent on her male superior and to live and work solely for his benefit. *Lodore* is a much more elaborate comment on this fifth book of *Émile*.

Émile is so important a text for Shelley and for her predecessors because Rousseau is the period's most powerful apologist for the commonly held view that education should be sexual, that is, that its character should be determined by the sex of the pupil. Rousseau, as always, is inconsistent. At one point he claims, 'In everything that does not discriminate

²⁵⁸ See H.N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1913), 83.

the sex, woman is man; she has the same organs, wants and faculties.²⁵⁹ But the claim of equality between the sexes is immediately contradicted: ‘one must be active and strong, the other passive and feeble; one must necessarily have power and will; it is sufficient that the other makes but a faint resistance’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 5). It is a point that Rousseau insists upon: ‘If woman is framed to please and to live in subjection, she must render herself agreeable to man, instead of provoking his wrath.’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 5). Rousseau does allow women power, but it is simply the power to arouse male desire:

But from an invariable law of nature, which by investing the female with a greater facility of exciting the desires of the male, than the latter has of satisfying them, makes him depend, whether he will or not, on the good pleasure of the female; and obliges him in his turn, to endeavour to conciliate her affections, to the end that she may consent to let him continue in possession of the sovereignty. (*Emilius*, Book V, 8)

Even when Rousseau seems to express of progressive concern for women’s welfare, it is only to safeguard the welfare of men: ‘During her pregnancy a great deal of tenderness and care are necessary; in her lying-in she requires silence and rest; to suckle her children she must lead an easy sedentary life; to bring them up, she must be mistress of great patience and sweetness, and of such invariable affection, as nothing can discourage; she is the band that connects them and their father’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 10). It is this final duty that is paramount: ‘she alone renders them amiable in his eye and inspires him with the confidence to call them his own’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 10). Women’s aspirations are contemptuously dismissed: There neither is, nor can be the same strictness, in the relative duties of the two sexes’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 11). Rousseau concludes that ‘[w]hen once it is demonstrated that men and women neither are, nor ought to be constituted in the same manner, nor have the same turn and temper of mind, it follows from thence, that their education should be different’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 15). Any other possibility is treated with aggressive irony: ‘Well, then, henceforward determine to bring them up as men: the latter

²⁵⁹ Jean Jaques Rousseau, *Emilius, or a Treatise of Education*, Vol. 3, Book V, (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1768), 4.

will consent to it with all their hearts! The more the fair sex endeavour to resemble ours, the less power and influence they will have over us; and then it is that we shall be really masters.’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 16). He concludes that ‘were women to cultivate the manly qualities, and to neglect those which belong to their own sex, they would evidently act contrary to their own interest’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 16). For Rousseau the pressing need in any sexual relationship between a man and a woman is that the two parties feel sexual desire for one another, and sexual desire, Rousseau believes, can be maintained only by the reinforcement of sexual difference: ‘men depend on the women by their desires; the women on us, both by their desires and their wants’ (*Emilius*, Book V, 17). Rousseau’s conclusion is clear:

Thus the education of the fair sex should be entirely relative to ours. To oblige us, to do us service, to gain our love and esteem, to rear us when young, to attend us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to soothe our pains, and to soften life with every kind of blandishment; these are the duties of the sex at all times, and what they ought to learn from their infancy. (*Emilius*, Book V, 18)

Given this, it is entirely predictable that Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay should have responded so aggressively. But even the seemingly more moderate Mary Shelley could not ignore the provocation, and she responds most fully in her novel *Lodore*.

In *Lodore* Mary Shelley revisits the debate on education in general, and the education appropriate to women in particular that had exercised her mother’s generation in the 1780s and 1790s, but she responds far more flexibly than her predecessors had done. As Charlene Bunnell argues, on one level, *Lodore* is a novel that investigates how children may suffer both from their parents’ control and from their parents’ neglect: in *Lodore*, ‘Mary Shelley explores the disastrous results of parents who exert too much control over their respective children and of those who do not take an active part in their child’s life at all. In this generational novel, Lord Lodore and Lady Santerre manipulate the education of

their children for personal gain and twisted vindictiveness'.²⁶⁰ But it is a novel in which she is just as interested in good parenting as in bad. There are many instances of more or less successful models of education in *Lodore*, the three most elaborate cases being those of Lady Santerre, Ethel Lodore and Fanny Derham, and what is striking is that they seem utterly different.

4. 2. 1. Ethel Lodore's Education

Ethel Lodore is the central character of the novel, despite the title's deriving from her father's name. It is a device through which Shelley is able to raise, even on the title page, the question of whether a woman should be acknowledged as independent of the man, the question that is investigated in the whole novel. Ethel was removed from her mother by her father when she was still an infant. Her father, Henry Fitzhenry, Lord Lodore, emigrates with his daughter to the New World in order to escape the consequences of a youthful indiscretion and adult passion (he refuses a challenge because the man challenging him is, although he does not know it, his illegitimate son). His wife might have prevented this step, or accompanied him herself, but for the fatal interference of her own self-willed and self-centred mother, Lady Santerre. Ever since, Ethel has been brought up by her father alone in the retirement and seclusion of the wilderness of the Illinois. Ethel 'had been sedulously kept away from communication with the settlers--- an arrangement which it would have been difficult to bring about elsewhere, but in this secluded and almost deserted spot the usual characteristics of the Americans were scarcely to be found' (*Lodore*, 64). Her father takes great care that she does not mingle with a class that he deems inappropriate to her, and since there is hardly anybody else to socialize with, Ethel becomes a child of nature:

When not with him, she was the playmate of nature. Her birds and pet animals---her untaught but most kind nurse, were her associates: she had her flowers to watch over,

²⁶⁰ Bunnell, 'Breaking the Tie that Binds', 32.

her music, her drawings, and her books. Nature, wild, interminable, sublime, was around her. The ceaseless flow of the brawling stream, the wide-spread forest, the changes of the sky, the career of the wide-winged clouds, when the winds drove them athwart the atmosphere, or the repose of the still, and stirless summer air, the stormy war of the elements, and the sense of trust and security amidst their loudest disturbances, were all circumstances to mould her even unconsciously to an admiration of all that is grand and beautiful. (*Lodore*, 66)

In this she resembles Sibella Valmont in Eliza Fenwick's novel *Secresy* who is brought up by her Uncle in Valmont castle with hardly any human contact and no formal education.²⁶¹ She lives mainly in the castle and haunts its surrounding forest in unfashionable dress and with her hair flying loosely. Sibella is also brought up with hardly any human contact. Both Ethel and Sibella might seem to enjoy the kind of education that Coleridge anticipated for his son Hartley in 'Frost at Midnight', but in both cases appearances are deceptive. Ethel becomes a child of nature because of her father's unwillingness to allow her to mix with those he deems her social inferiors. Her natural education is the product of his civilised prejudices. Similarly, Sibella's uncle speaks 'mysteriously of his systems, and his plans, of his authority, his wisdom, and [her] dependence, of his right of chusing for [her], and of [her] positive duty of obeying him without reserve or discussion'.²⁶² She is brought up in the belief that she is 'born to the exercise of no will; to the exercise of no duties but submission; that wisdom owns [her] not, knows [her] not, could not find in [her] a resting place' (*Secresy*, 33). Her education in nature is designed not to enfranchise but to enslave her. We later learn that Mr Valmont plans to raise Sibella as a bride for his own bastard son, whom he adopts so that the world does not realize who he really is. It is the son, Clement, who is allowed a schoolmaster and given a formal education, while Sibella's only lessons are in submission to male power. She is an heiress and yet this knowledge is kept from her to make her an obedient pupil. Mr Valmont, clearly intended as a baleful parody of Rousseau, has designed an educational system that he believes will produce a

²⁶¹ Eliza Fenwick was the wife of John Fenwick, a close friend of Godwin's. Through Godwin she became acquainted with Mary Wollstonecraft. See Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 383.

²⁶² Eliza Fenwick, *Secresy, or the Ruin on the Rock* (London: Pandora Press, 1989), 17.

man and a woman who will give birth to a new and superior race. He sends Clement on a Grand Tour so that he may discover for himself the vices of the world which he himself abhors. He keeps Sibella from the world in order to make her submissive and obedient to her future husband. Predictably, this educational scheme fails. Clement learns to take pleasure in the world rather than to be repelled by it and in the end marries a rich widow for money and Sibella dies after miscarrying their love child.

Lodore's educational aim is quite different, but some of the circumstances are interestingly similar. Lodore seems to accept the programme of female education enjoined by male advisers; indeed, his chief model for his ideal of a woman is Milton's Eve:

It was Fitzhenry's wish to educate his daughter to all the perfection of which the feminine character is susceptible. As the first step, he cut her off from familiar communication with the unrefined, and, watching over her with the fondest care, kept her far aloof from the very knowledge of what might, by its baseness or folly, contaminate the celestial beauty of her nature. He resolved to make her all that woman can be of generous, soft, and devoted; to purge away every alloy of vanity and petty passion---to fill her with honour, and yet to mould her to the sweetest gentleness: to cultivate her tastes and enlarge her mind, yet so to controul her acquirements, as to render her ever pliant to his will. (*Lodore*, 65)

He wants her to be 'a creature half poetry, half love' (*Lodore*, 65), and seems quite blind to the self-contradictory nature of his project, which requires him at once to 'enlarge her mind' and 'render her ever pliant to his will'. Accordingly, Ethel receives an education that turns her into a pliant pupil with no ability to think and act for herself, with the consequence that she is utterly lost in the world without a guiding figure. As Brunnell writes:

Not one of the three figures that [Lodore] draws upon as roles for Ethel- Eve the helpmate, the fair damsel of romance, and *The Tempest's* Miranda, whose fate is completely dependent upon her benevolent father- teaches the young girl independence or selfhood. Instead, all three literary figures are designed to shape her into the type of woman Lodore has imagined is the ideal: submissive, pliable, and dependent.²⁶³

²⁶³ Bunnell, 'Breaking the Tie that Binds', 49.

Ethel seems to turn into exactly this kind of woman, yet, she is not weak:

There is a peculiarity in the education of a daughter, brought up by a father only, which tends to develop early a thousand of those portions of mind, which are folded up, and often destroyed, under mere feminine tuition. He made her fearless, by making her the associate of his rides; yet his incessant care and watchfulness, the observant tenderness of his manner, almost reverential on many points, springing from the differences of sex, tended to soften her mind, and make her spirit ductile and dependent. He taught her to scorn pain, but to shrink with excessive timidity from any thing that intrenched on the barrier of womanly reserve which he raised about her. Nothing was dreaded, indeed, by her, except his disapprobation; and a word or look from him made her, with all her childish vivacity and thoughtlessness, turn as with a silken string, and bend at once to his will. (*Lodore*, 62)

Lodore tries to make her fearless, yet he makes her fear his own disapproval and thus makes her utterly dependent on himself as well as the husband that may one day take his place. The kind of woman Lodore tries to create, much as Frankenstein creates his monster, is a woman who complies with all the wishes spoken or unspoken of her superior male partner: ‘Nothing with her centred in self; [...] to please her father was the unsleeping law of all her actions, while his approbation imparted a sense of such pure but entire happiness, that every other feeling faded into insignificance in the comparison’ (*Lodore*, 63). Bunnell teases out the parallels with Shelley’s first novel:

The parallels to *Frankenstein* are evident: Lodore is as intent on creating a perfect specimen for selfish motives as is Victor. His aim is to shape a daughter who will not only bless him as a father but will also represent his ideal image of woman, an image that, for different reasons, neither Theodora Lyzinski nor Cornelia can achieve.²⁶⁴

Lisa Hopkins adds that ‘the fact that this text is less openly concerned with monstrosity than Mary Shelley’s earlier novels means only that the ever-latent fear of monstrosity may have found more subtle but also more insidious manifestations’.²⁶⁵ Ethel is Lodore’s creation and he is very proud of what he has achieved:

²⁶⁴ Charlene E. Bunnell, ‘The Illusion of “Great Expectations”: Manners and Morals in Mary Shelley’s *Lodore* and *Falkner*’, in *Iconoclastic Departures*, ed. Syndy M. Conger et. al. (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1997), pp. 275-291, 279.

²⁶⁵ Lisa Hopkins, “A Medea, in More Senses than the More Obvious One”: Motherhood in Mary Shelley’s *Lodore* and *Falkner*, *Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Vol.2, 2002, 397.

When he looked on her, and reflected that within her frame dwelt spotless innocence and filial piety, that within that lovely 'bower of flesh', not one thought or feeling resided that was not akin to heaven in its purity and sweetness, he, as by infection, acquired a portion of the calm enjoyment, which she in her taintless youth naturally possessed. (*Lodore*, 64)

But his achievement is not entirely disinterested. He creates in her his own ideal woman with whom he finds an inner peace that he seems wholly unable to achieve on his own, and that he has signally failed to achieve with his wife. A woman, he believes, should be passive, helpless and completely dependent, a belief in which he has been confirmed by the failure of his own wife to display those qualities:

A lofty sense of independence is, in man, the best privilege of his nature. It cannot be doubted, but that it were for the happiness of the other sex that she were taught more to rely on and act for herself. But in the cultivation of this feeling, the education of Fitzhenry was lamentably deficient. Ethel was taught to know herself dependent; the support of another was to be as necessary to her as her daily food. She leant on her father as a prop that could not fail, and she was wholly satisfied with her condition. (*Lodore*, 66)

Lodore's psychology is transparent, but it serves also to expose the insistence by Rousseau and his followers that women must be educated into dependence. Ethel silently complies with the dependence that is demanded of her and that is the only state that she has ever known, even though her father has made no provision for what will become of her in the event of his death. Through the character of Ethel, Mary Shelley tests the results of what her mother calls a 'sexual' education. She shows that this sort of education leaves a woman unable to fend for herself. Although Ethel is strong willed, she is often helpless, because she simply does not know what to do. Ethel is left an orphan at the age of 14 with an ocean between her and her nearest relative. This is the result of a duel in which Lodore engages in spite of his responsibilities to his daughter. In this instance his pride once more overpowers even his love for his daughter as well as his sense of responsibility. Lodore travels with his daughter to America to escape from his wife, but also in some sense to escape from himself. In America, he seems to believe, he might win free of all those

aristocratic European codes that have stunted his human development. America might have offered him the chance to be reborn as a child of nature, the chance to live the life that Byron had, perhaps sentimentally, ascribed to Daniel Boone (see *Don Juan*, VIII, LXI-LXVII), but, as he reveals when he flinches from the vulgarity of his American neighbours, he carries with him into the New World his old self. That old self reveals itself again when he engages in a duel in New York, risking his life when his sole obligation should have been to his daughter. America in its early years was, as Shelley recognizes, addicted to duelling.²⁶⁶ It is an indication that America, the country to which Lodore migrated, has found it as impossible to separate itself from its past, as Lodore himself has done. Yet, Lodore at least, before he dies, finds a protector to guide his daughter home, and in him also her future husband.

4. 2. 2. Edward's Education

This future husband, Edward Villiers was the son of a man of fortune. His father had been left a widower young in life, with this only child, who, 'thus single and solitary in his paternal home, became almost adopted into the family of his mother's brother, Viscount Maristow. This nobleman being rich, married, and blessed with a numerous progeny, the presence of little Edward was not felt as a burthen, and he was brought up with his cousins like one of them' (*Lodore*, 188). He is, however, another victim of his education. Mary Shelley is making the important point that the errors in the education of girls are often inextricably bound up with errors in the education of boys:

Edward was brought up in all the magnificence of his uncle's lordly abode. Luxury and profusion were the elements of the air he breathed. To be without any desired object that could be purchased, appeared baseness and lowest penury. He, also, was considered the favoured one of fortune in the family circle. (*Lodore*, 218)

²⁶⁶ See Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honour: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

‘He was brought up to look upon himself as a rich man, and to act as such’ (*Lodore*, 218). But his father’s gambling leaves him without the means to live the life that he had been educated for. He ‘had not learnt to set a right value upon money; and he squandered whatever he obtained with thoughtless profusion. He had no friend to whose counsel he could recur’ (*Lodore*, 220). Edward’s education, like Ethel’s, does not prepare him for the realities of life. He is brought up as a gentleman completely unsuited to a trade or profession of any kind.

Blest with a buoyant, and even careless spirit, as far as regarded himself, he had a softness, a delicacy, and a gentleness, with respect to others, which animated his manners with irresistible fascination. His heart was open to pity---his soul the noblest and clearest ever fashioned by nature in her happiest mood. (*Lodore*, 176/77)

Edward is described by Ethel as ‘the kindest-hearted creature in the world’ (*Lodore*, 182). Yet being kind-hearted does not resolve any of his problems. Again, Mary Shelley paints in him a character that slightly resembles her own husband: ‘Villiers was imprudent from his belief in the goodness of his fellow-creatures, and imparted happiness from the store that his warm heart insured to himself’ (*Lodore*, 182). A firm believer in the goodness of mankind, Edward does not see the obstacles that are placed in front of him and prevent his own happiness.

Edward Villiers was the only child of a man of considerable fortune, who had early in life become a widower. From the period of this event, Colonel Villiers (for his youth had been passed in the army, where he obtained promotion) had led the careless life of a single man. His son's home was at Maristow Castle, when not at school; and the father seldom remembered him except as an incumbrance; for his estate was strictly entailed, so that he could only consider himself possessed of a life interest in a property, which would devolve, without restriction, on his more fortunate son. (*Lodore*, 218)

Here, as in the case of Lady Santerre, Cornelia *Lodore*’s mother, we encounter a selfish parent who neglects his duties towards his only child. Chief amongst those duties is an understanding of money and the privileges and obligations that the possession of money

entails. His education brought him up to act in a certain manner, and he strictly adheres to a code he has been brought up on.

Poor Edward heard of these things, but did not mark them. He indulged in no blameworthy pursuits, nor spent more than beseemed a man in his rank of life. The idea of debt was familiar to him: every one---even Lord Maristow---was in debt, far beyond his power of immediate payment. He followed the universal example, and suffered no inconvenience, while his wants were obligingly supplied by the fashionable tradesmen. He regarded the period of his coming of age as a time when he should become disembarrassed, and enter upon life with ample means, and still more brilliant prospects. (*Lodore*, 219)

Edward never acts contrary to what his education has taught him, yet his education does not fit him to meet the new demands placed on him when he is forced to recognize that his inheritance has been dissipated. When Edward realizes that his father has spent all his inheritance, he is utterly helpless as to what to do: '[b]rought up in the midst of the wealthy, he had early imbibed a horror of pecuniary obligation [...] [y]et with all this, he had not learnt to set a right value upon money;' (*Lodore*, 220/21). Edward's education implies that there is no want of money and he acts accordingly:

Edward was naturally extravagant; or, to speak more correctly, his education and position implanted and fostered habits of expense and prodigality, while his careless disposition was unapt to calculate consequences: his very attempts at economy frequently cost him more than his most expensive whims. (*Lodore*, 221)

Only when he finds himself unable to repay his debtors does he realize his helplessness. He is also selfish enough not to quit Ethel's company when he realizes that he is not in a financial position that would enable him to support her as his wife: 'His resolution was made. He would not deny himself the present pleasure of seeing her, to spare any future pain in which he should be the only sufferer; but on the first token of exclusive regard on her side, he would withdraw for ever' (*Lodore*, 223). Withdraw he does not (although, to be fair, he does try): instead he marries an innocent girl who is wholly dependent on a male protector because this is the only life she knows, the only life her education has made her fit for.

Lodore breaks entirely new ground in Shelley's fiction in its detailed and rigorous exploration of the economic basis of domestic happiness. Clearly, Shelley is drawing on memories of her own early married life, in which she and her husband had been pursued by creditors often from lodging to lodging, and more distantly on the life of her father, which had been rendered painful and even disreputable by his inability to bring order to his finances. *Lodore* is the first of Mary Shelley's novels to recognize her characters as economic beings, and that recognition carries over into her investigation of what constitutes a right education. It must be, amongst much else, an education in the economic realities of life in the nineteenth century.

4. 2. 3. Cornelia Santerre's Education

Ethel's mother Cornelia Santerre's education is not significantly different from the one Ethel receives at the hand of her father, the only real difference being that she received it from her mother. Lady Santerre educates her daughter to be completely dependent on her, but in her case the motives for this kind of education are even less disinterested than in the case of *Lodore*. Lady Santerre keeps her daughter a recluse because she intends to use her daughter for her own purposes, that is, to improve her own circumstances:

Lady Santerre yielded, retired to Bath, and fixed her hopes on her daughter, whom she resolved should hereafter make a splendid match. Her excessive beauty promised to render this scheme feasible; and now that she was nearly sixteen, her mother began to look forward anxiously. She had retired to Wales this summer, that, by living with yet stricter economy, she might be enabled, during the winter, to put her plans into execution with greater ease. (*Lodore*, 95)

The system of education under which Lady *Lodore* was raised is described in similar terms to Lord *Lodore*'s education of Ethel:

She was a clever though uneducated woman: perfectly selfish, soured with the world, yet clinging to it. To make good her second entrance on its stage, she believed it necessary to preserve unlimited sway over the plastic mind of her daughter. If she had acted with integrity, her end had been equally well secured; but unfortunately, she was by nature framed to prefer the zig-zag to the straight line; added to which,

she was imperious, and could not bear a rival near her throne. From the first, therefore, she exerted herself to secure her empire over Cornelia; she spared neither flattery nor artifice; and, well acquainted as she was with every habit and turn of her daughter's mind, her task was comparatively easy. (*Lodore*, 100)

Again, in a style that is quite similar to *Frankenstein*, Lady Santerre is described as the creator of her daughter, the 'mad scientist' forming and deforming the character of her daughter, the 'magician' who paralyzes the mind of her daughter keeping her in a trance that focuses only on the importance of her own person. She achieves this total control through 'flattery' as well as 'artifice' neither of which is suspected by her daughter, who is not familiar with the ways of the world and completely dependent on her mother. Lodore is an idealist. His ambition is to bring up a daughter who will conform to his ideal of womanhood. Lady Santerre by contrast is an emphatically worldly woman. It is interesting and significant that both these contrasting characters bring up their children in a manner that prevents them from achieving independence.

It is also all the mother's doing that Lodore first conceives of the idea of marrying Cornelia:

Lodore would never have thought of marrying Cornelia, but that Lady Santerre was at hand to direct the machinery of the drama. She inspired him with the wish to gift her angelic child with the worldly advantages which his wife must possess; to play a god-like part, and to lift into prosperity and happiness, one who seemed destined by fortune to struggle with adversity. (*Lodore*, 98/99)

The marriage does not work because Cornelia's bond with her mother remains stronger than her bond with her husband: 'They had seen, that, in the domestic *coterie*, mother and daughter were familiar friends, sharing each thought and wish, but that Lodore was one apart, banished, or exiling himself from the dearest blessings of friendship and love' (*Lodore*, 100). When Lodore has to leave the country as a consequence of his indiscretions, it is Lady Santerre, who 'was a worldly woman and an oily flatterer' (*Lodore*, 99) who persuades her daughter not to accompany him, even when he takes with him their daughter.

Only once her mother dies is Cornelia Lodore able to discover an independent will of her own.

The interference of her mother is, however only one of the reasons for the failure of their marriage, another being the fact that Lord Lodore never really was looking for a bride but, as later with his daughter, for the embodiment of his feminine ideal. It is a masculine trait with which Shelley became very familiar during her marriage. As Percy Shelley wrote to his friend, John Gisborne, after the unhappy termination of the relationship with Emilia Viviani that had prompted the most important of all his love poems, *Epipsychidion*, 'I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal.'²⁶⁷ There is clear evidence that by the time that her husband died Mary Shelley was finding the whole business rather tiresome. In a letter to John Gisborne's partner, Maria Gisborne, Mary offered her own dry commentary on 'Shelley's Italian platonics'. The ineffable Emilia had emerged from the convent in which Shelley found her immured, married a man called Biondi, and was leading him and his mother 'a devil of a life'. The whole affair put Mary in mind of a nursery rhyme:

As I was going down Cranbourne Lane,
Cranbourne lane was dirty,
And there I met a pretty maid,
Who dropt to me a curt'sey;
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.²⁶⁸

Lodore sees in Cornelia what P. B. Shelley saw in Emilia Viviani, the embodiment of his ideal: 'Here was the very being his heart had pined for---a girl radiant in innocence and youth, the nursling, so he fancied, of mountains, waterfalls, and solitude; yet endowed with

²⁶⁷ *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 2, 434.

²⁶⁸ *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 2 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 1, 223.

all the softness and refinement of civilized society' (*Lodore*, 95-6). The improbability of her conforming to the picture he forms of her is betrayed by the self-contradictory nature of that ideal. He requires his partner to be at once a child of nature and the product of a sophisticated society, in other words, a living paradox. He falls for her just because she seems ignorant of the world; she was 'that daughter fairer than imagination could paint, young, gentle, blameless, knowing nothing beyond obedience to her parent, and untaught in the guile of mankind' (*Lodore*, 96). She seems the perfect *tabula rasa* for an experienced educated man to draw on and form to his will: 'He found the lovely girl somewhat ignorant; but white paper to be written upon at will, is a favourite metaphor among those men who have described the ideal of a wife' (*Lodore*, 96). Lisa Hopkins suggests that 'Godwin's adherence to Lockean *tabula rasa* theory is critiqued here- as elsewhere in Mary Shelley's novels—in its appropriation for *Lodore*'s attitude to his wife.'²⁶⁹ No doubt she is right, but it is also true that Rousseau treats Sophie as a blank page on which he can transcribe his own ideal of femininity.

For Lord *Lodore*, his wife seems to be a toy rather than an equal partner to share his life. He expected to have 'married one so young, that her education, even if its foundation had been good, required finishing, and who as it was, had every thing to learn' (*Lodore*, 102). His project, of course, ends in total failure. The influence Lady Santerre holds over Cornelia is much older and goes much deeper than his newly legally acquired guardianship. The undeserved trust that Cornelia invests in Lady Santerre weighs much stronger with her than *Lodore*'s efforts to educate her into becoming the wife that he desires. The consequences are completely predictable:

When her husband would have educated her mind, and withdrawn her from the dangers of dissipation, she looked on his conduct as tyrannical and cruel. She retreated from his manly guidance, to the pernicious guardianship of Lady Santerre,

²⁶⁹ Lisa Hopkins, "A Medea, in More Senses than the More Obvious One", 397.

and she sheltered herself at her side, from any effort Lodore might make for her improvement. (*Lodore*, 101)

The marriage becomes a contest between Cornelia's mother and her husband for dominance, and it is an entirely unequal contest:

and while inexperience rendered her incapable of entering into the feelings of her husband, she displayed towards him none of that deference, and yielding submission, which might reasonably have been expected from her youth, but that her mother was there to claim them for herself, and to inculcate, as far as she could, that while she was her natural friend, Lodore was her natural enemy. (*Lodore*, 102-3)

The seclusion from the world that Cornelia's mother has imposed on her daughter has resulted in an inexperience that makes her almost ignorant of other people's feelings and even the slightest duties that one might think a wife owes a husband (and vice versa). She really seems to ignore her husband and to imagine him to be an intruder in the life as she used to live it when her only significant relationship was with her mother.

Marriage was for Lodore from the first a project, and its failure leaves him unhappy and perplexed:

He had expected to find truth, clearness of spirit, and complying gentleness, the adorning qualities of the unsophisticated girl, and he found her the willing disciple of one whose selfish and artful character was in direct contradiction to his own. (*Lodore*, 101)

Accordingly, the marriage for both of the parties to it results only in disappointment, despite which, as his education of his own daughter goes on to show, Lodore learns nothing whatsoever from the unhappy experience. As Bunnell puts it, '[a]lthough Lodore had failed in his Pygmalion plan for Cornelia, and although he had criticized Lady Santerre's strong hold on her daughter, he repeats his earlier mistake and imitates his mother-in-law's very example in his instruction of Ethel.'²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Bunnell, 'The Illusion of "Great Expectations"', 279.

4. 2. 4. Fanny Derham's Education

The pliant, dependent Ethel Lodore, who has undergone the 'sexual' education that is designed to produce man's perfect mate, is contrasted with Fanny Derham, a young woman who has received a completely different education from a father who believes that a woman should receive the same education as a man. But Fanny's strength of character is as much a consequence of her father's weakness as his wisdom. Mrs Greville, a friend of the family, describes Fanny thus:

Fanny never was a child. Mrs. Derham and her daughter Sarah bustled through the business of life---of the farm and the house; while it devolved on Fanny to attend to, to wait upon, her father. She was his pupil---he her care. The relation of parent and child subsisted between them, on a different footing than in ordinary cases. Fanny nursed her father, watched over his health and humours, with the tenderness and indulgence of a mother; while he instructed her in the dead languages, and other sorts of abstruse learning, which seldom make a part of a girl's education. Fanny, to use her own singular language, loves philosophy, and pants after knowledge, and indulges in a thousand Platonic dreams, which I know nothing about; and this mysterious and fanciful learning she has dwelt upon with tenfold fervour since her arrival in America. (*Lodore*, 144)

The father's impracticality may owe something to Shelley's memories of her own chaotic childhood in the house of a father who was as incapable of efficient practicality as Fanny's. It is interesting to note that Mrs Greville uses the word 'abstruse' in order to describe Fanny's education. Many and especially male contemporaries would have agreed.

Fanny and Ethel are complete opposites, yet Ethel's father 'excited Ethel to admire the concentrated and independent spirit of her new friend; and entered into conversation with Fanny on ancient philosophy, which was unintelligible and mysterious to Ethel' (*Lodore*, 146). Ethel and Fanny become very good friends despite their differences. While Ethel amuses 'herself with her books, her music, her gardening, her needle, and, more than all, her new and very favourite study of drawing and sketching' (*Lodore*, 70), all of which are the typical accomplishments of upper-class women, to Fanny nothing is of any

importance 'but the philosophy which [her father] taught [her]' (*Lodore*, 315). She is not interested in needlework or painting: '[t]he only pleasure which attracted her young mind was study---a deep and unremitting application to those profound acquirements, to the knowledge of which her father had introduced her' (*Lodore*, 144).

Neither young woman is able to comprehend the way the other chooses to live and yet they have one thing in common. The education of neither equips her to live a fulfilled life. While Ethel is ignorant of the ways of the world and in some instances so naïve that the reader often wonders how she manages to come through her adventures unscathed, Fanny is rendered completely unable to mix with men and women of her own class. While Ethel becomes through her education a woman who can only live a complete life if she is able to find a male protector, Fanny has been made so emotionally and intellectually self-sufficient that she seems to feel no need for the opposite sex at all:

Such a woman as Fanny was more made to be loved by her own sex than by the opposite one. Superiority of intellect, joined to acquisitions beyond those usual even to men; and both announced with frankness, though without pretension, forms a kind of anomaly little in accord with masculine taste. Fanny could not be the rival of women, and, therefore, all her merits were appreciated by them. (*Lodore*, 317)

Shelley may lightly indicate here for her more advanced readers that Fanny's most intimate relationships are with her own sex. It seems appropriate to recall that in 1827 Shelley had assisted in the 'marriage' between Mary Diana Dods and Isabel Robinson.²⁷¹ When Ethel, at a much later point of the novel hints that she thinks Fanny's studies a waste of time, the latter explains her chosen way of life thus:

"Pardon me! I do not waste my life," replied Fanny, with her sunny smile;---"nor am I unhappy---far otherwise. An ardent thirst for knowledge, is as the air I breathe; and the acquisition of it, is pure and unalloyed happiness. I aspire to be useful to my fellow-creatures: but that is a consideration for the future, when fortune shall smile on me; now I have but one passion; it swallows up every other; it dwells with my darling books, and is fed by the treasures of beauty and wisdom which they contain." (*Lodore*, 316)

²⁷¹ See Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, 280-9.

Fanny is a young woman, thirsty for knowledge, a knowledge most women of her generation could only dream about if they even considered this kind of knowledge desirable. For Fanny it is the source of everything that is beautiful. It shapes her character, enabling her to free herself from ‘hypocrisy, or selfishness’ and to aim for the greater good in life (*Lodore*, 307). Her education makes her believe that

[w]ords have more power than any one can guess; it is by words that the world's great fight, now in these civilized times, is carried on; I never hesitated to use them, when I fought any battle for the miserable and oppressed. People are so afraid to speak, it would seem as if half our fellow-creatures were born with deficient organs; like parrots they can repeat a lesson, but their voice fails them, when that alone is wanting to make the tyrant quail. (*Lodore*, 316)

Fanny is a firm believer in the possibility that words are able to change the world. This is why she does not consider her studies a waste of time, and yet she also seems to recognize that her studies are an alternative to, even a distraction from, an engagement with the world. She studies words in order to change the world and yet, ‘[w]hile I converse every day with Plato, and Cicero, and Epictetus, the world, as it is, passes from before me like a vain shadow’ (*Lodore*, 317). Yet Fanny’s education has given her a willingness to help others, and equipped her with the independence, the moral courage, and the experience of the world that enables her to do so:

Fanny's first principle was, that what she ought to do, that she could do, without hesitation or regard for obstacles. She had something Quixotic in her nature; or rather she would have had, if a clear head and some experience, even young as she was, had not stood in the way of her making any glaring mistakes; so that her enterprises were never ridiculous; and being usually successful, could not be called extravagant. (*Lodore*, 323)

4. 3. Consequences of the Various Educations

The examples of Ethel, Cornelia and Fanny, and, although the treatment of his education is more perfunctory, Edward have shown us four different kinds of education, the ‘sexual’

education that prepares a woman for her role in society as it is, a kind of education which leads the pupil to rely solely on the educating parent, a 'male' education which focuses on abstract learning and ancient languages, and a gentleman's education which, as Edward's case has shown, does not prepare a man for the possibility of the loss (be it self-inflicted or otherwise) of a fortune. The next part of this chapter investigates the direct consequences for these characters of the education that they have been given.

4. 3. 1. Consequences of Ethel's Education

The following quotation quite clearly shows what the immediate results of Ethel's education are:

She had a clear and upright spirit, and suspicion or unkindness roused her to indignation, or sunk her into the depths of sorrow. Place her in danger, and tell her she must encounter it, and she called up all her courage and became a heroine; but on less occasions, difficulties dismayed and annoyed her, and she longed to escape from them into that dreamy existence, for which her solitary mode of life had given her a taste: active in person, in mind she was too often indolent, and apt to think that while she was docile to the injunctions of her parent, all her duties were fulfilled. She seldom thought, and never acted, for herself. (*Lodore*, 66/67)

If she is told to do something, she can find within herself the bravery to do it, yet her education leaves her deficient in the ability to make a decision for herself and act upon it. As already mentioned, Ethel has been trained to act on the wishes of a male protector and she wholly relies on this guardian to make her decisions for her. She is utterly unfit for the social world, the world of 'society', to which she is introduced when she returns to her aunt in the old world. Her upbringing in the wilderness and solitude of America makes her feel uncomfortable amongst others and, although she has every accomplishment expected of a lady, she does not know how to comport herself in society. At one point Ethel's innocence of the ways of the world does, however, turn out to be a blessing of sorts: she thinks nothing of borrowing money from relatives, as, unlike Edward, she does not have any idea

of the obligations and duties this brings with it. She does not have a very clear idea of money at all:

With Ethel's deep and warm affection, had she been ten or only five years older, she also must have participated in Edward's inquietude. But care is a word, not an emotion, for the very young. She was only seventeen. She had never attended to the disbursements of money---she was ignorant of the mechanism of giving and receiving, on which the course of our life depends. It was in vain that she sought in the interior of her mind for an image that should produce fear or regret, with regard to the absence or presence of money. (*Lodore*, 266)

When travelling alone she overtips the bell boy at Edward's club, an error that, although fortuitously, turns out very well, because it is the means by which she buys his eternal gratitude so that he keeps her informed of everything that is going on in the club. Her ignorance of money is significant because it is at once a character trait, and a generic characteristic of the kind of novel that Mary Shelley had herself hitherto written, a novel in which characters behave as if they were wholly autonomous and not, as it is in the world in which people actually live, influenced if not determined by economics:

Unused to every money transaction, she had not that terror of obligation, nor dislike of asking, which is so necessary to preserve our independence, and even our sense of justice, through life. Money had always been placed like counters in her hand; she had never known whence it came, and until her marriage, she had never disposed of more than very small sums. Subsequently Villiers had been the director of their expenses. This was the faulty part of her father's system of education. (*Lodore*, 330)

Her lack of understanding is not solely Ethel's fault. Yet Edward very patronizingly chides her for her mistakes and even when he tries to explain the laws of his country to her he seems more like a teacher than a husband:

you do not understand these things, and will wonder when I tell you, that when the clock strikes twelve on Saturday night, the magic spells and potent charms of Saunders's friends cease to have power: at that hour I shall be restored to you. Wait till then---and *then* we will consult for the future. Have patience, dearest love: you have wedded poverty, hardship, and annoyance; but, joined to these, is the fondest, the most faithful heart in the world. (*Lodore*, 314)

‘You do not understand these things,’ in this case the immunity from arrest that all debtors enjoyed on the Sabbath, is an artfully chosen expression. It is condescending while still managing to insinuate that Ethel’s ignorance is an aspect of her feminine charm. Similar sentiments prompt many of his remarks: “Silly people you women are,” said Villiers: “you can do nothing by yourselves: and are always running against posts, unless guided by others’ (*Lodore*, 215). Villiers is charmed by Ethel’s ignorance, but the charm derives partly from his confidence that it places Ethel in his power. Ethel and Edward are both sympathetic characters but this does not prevent Shelley from recognizing that in their relationship as in all marital relationships there is an ongoing struggle for power. At one point, Edward complains: “I could call you unkind, Ethel,” he said, “not to yield to me.” She replies: “I will yield to you,” said Ethel, “but you are wrong to ask me.” (*Lodore*, 320). This very short dialogue clearly defines their roles, Edward is the male guardian that Ethel has been trained to rely on, and Ethel is more than willing to rely on him, despite the fact that she distinctly feels that he is wrong: ‘She relied on him as the support of her life---her guide and protector---she loved him as the giver of good to her---she almost worshipped him for the many virtues, which he either really possessed, or with which her fondness bounteously gifted him’ (*Lodore*, 234). Shelley regards her sympathetically, but it is a sympathy that clearly does not preclude a recognition that the marriage she is describing is of a kind that had prompted her mother’s fierce disapproval. For Wollstonecraft, ‘to be a good mother a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands’.²⁷²

Ethel does not know how to stand up for herself. Only when Edward, her second male protector, is removed from her is she forced to act for herself. She makes the decision to follow him, and this marks the beginning of her development towards independent selfhood. As Bunnell puts it, ‘Although brought up to be dependent, [...], Ethel quietly but

²⁷² Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 233.

deliberately challenges the boundaries imposed by marriage and social manners.²⁷³ She sets out alone, even leaving her maid behind, to travel a long distance quite unaccompanied. Ethel proves to have courage enough and her character proves to be strong enough to brave the world.

4. 3. 2. Consequences of Cornelia's Education

The ill consequences of Cornelia's education extend more widely than the failure of her marriage. It is her education that leaves her vulnerable to the unnatural influence of her mother, Lady Santerre. Due to her stubborn attachment to her mother, Cornelia loses her child even before *Lodore* takes her with him to the New World. She has not learned to accept that love can be shared: 'She was jealous of her daughter with her husband, of her husband with her daughter' (*Lodore*, 106). She does not seem able to develop any maternal feelings towards her daughter, because she remains so completely a daughter herself, so subject to her mother's influence. Jowell suggests that 'in Lady *Lodore*'s jealousy of her daughter's relationship with Lord *Lodore*, Mary Shelley depicts what psychoanalysis would call an unresolved Oedipus complex.'²⁷⁴ One might question Jowell's command of psychoanalytic terminology, but her term does at least serve to suggest that Shelley's understanding of the relationship owes something to her own hard-won understanding that her relationship with her own father had been so close that it had made it difficult for her to enter into the different kind of relationship demanded by marriage. Cornelia is even prepared to sacrifice her own child in the interests of pursuing with her husband the contest for dominance within the marriage that had from the first perverted their relationship:

What was her surprise and indignation, when she heard that her child and its attendant formed a part of his lordship's travelling suite. The mother's first impulse was to follow her offspring; but this was speedily exchanged for a bitter sense of

²⁷³ Bunnell, 'The Illusion of "Great Expectations"', 283.

²⁷⁴ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 308.

wrong, aversion to her husband, and a resolve not to yield one point, in the open warfare thus declared by him. (*Lodore*, 117)

Hurt pride and a feeling of wrong keep her from following her husband and fetching back her child. But she receives another chance, when *Lodore* waits for her to join them. Again Lady *Lodore* interferes: "I do not fear your decision," she said; "you will not abandon a parent, who has devoted herself to you from your cradle---who lives but for you." The unhappy girl, unable to resist her mother's appeal, threw herself into her arms' (*Lodore*, 128). Again *Cornelia* finds that her role as daughter is more powerful than the role of mother to which she has been unable to adapt. As *Bunnell* points out, '[w]riters such as *Fenwick*, *Opie*, and *Shelley* not only concentrated on the bond between children and parents, but also directed the spotlight to the parents' obligation to their children and, more significantly, their complicity in offsprings' destinies.'²⁷⁵

Lady *Santerre* is confident that *Lodore* 'will soon grow tired of playing the tragic hero on a stage surrounded by no spectators; he will discover the folly of his conduct; he will return, and plead for forgiveness, and feel that he is too fortunate in a wife, who has preserved her own conduct free from censure and remark, while he has made himself a laughing stock to all' (*Lodore*, 129). She fails to realize that *Lodore* does not have the power to return or change the cause of his future life. Were he to do so he would have to confront the loss of his reputation. By refusing a challenge he would be held to have forfeited his gentlemanly status, and *Lodore* is no more capable of feeling a proper contempt for gentlemanly reputation than is *Godwin's Falkland*. It is only if *Cornelia* were able to accept her husband's invitation to join them that the marriage might have been preserved. This, however, would compromise the settled life of luxury to which Lady *Santerre* has become accustomed and which she does not intend to give up for the rich son-in-law on whose fortune that life is founded. Her advice to her daughter is wholly self-interested: 'Firmness and discretion are the arms you must use against folly and violence.

²⁷⁵ *Bunnell*, 'Breaking the Tie that Binds', 33.

Yield, and you are the victim of a despotism without parallel, the slave of a task-master, whose first commands are gentle, soft, and easy injunctions to desert your mother' (*Lodore*, 129). As Bunnell puts it, 'Lady Santerre views her daughter not as a rational individual but as a commodity by which she herself can purchase a life of ease and social gain that her impoverished state cannot afford her.'²⁷⁶ The consequence of this scheming speech of Lady Santerre's is that

Cornelia listened, and was persuaded. Above all, Lady Santerre tried to impress upon her mind, that Lodore, finding her firm, would give up his rash schemes, and remain in Europe; that even he had, probably, never really contemplated crossing the Atlantic. At all events, that she must not be guided by the resolves, changeable as the moon, of a man governed by no sane purpose; but that, by showing herself determined, he would be brought to bend to her will. (*Lodore*, 129)

Cornelia follows the guidance of her trusted parent. She 'was nineteen; an age when youth is most arrogant, and most heedless of the feelings of others. Her beauty and the admiration it acquired, sate her on the throne of the world, and, to her own imagination, she looked down like an eastern princess, upon slaves only' (*Lodore*, 134). But her decision is the product not just of pride but of resentment: '[s]he was injured, insulted, despised, and her swelling soul was incapable of any second emotion to the scorn and hate with which she visited the author of her degradation' (*Lodore*, 135). In consequence, her child is taken away from her, she does not see it grow up, and they become completely estranged. Cornelia becomes a mother without a child and thus a person that is never quite a whole.

The deprivation of her child was the sole cloud that came between her and the sun. In despite of herself, she never saw a little cherub with rosy cheeks and golden hair, but her heart was visited by a pang; and in her dreams she often beheld, instead of the image of the gay saloons in which she spent her evenings, a desert wild---a solitary home---and tiny footsteps on the dewy grass, guiding her to her baby daughter, whose soft cooings, remembered during absence, were agonizing to her. She awoke, and vowed her soul to hatred of the author of her sufferings---the cruel-hearted, insolent Lodore; and then fled to pleasure as the means of banishing these sad and disturbing emotions. (*Lodore*, 137)

²⁷⁶ Bunnell, 'Breaking the Tie that Binds', 46.

She uses pleasure as a way to escape the emptiness within her produced by the absence of her child:

Nothing ever moved her to sorrow, except the reflection that now and then came across, that she had a child---divorced for ever from her maternal bosom. The sight of a baby cradled in its mother's arms, or stretching out its little hands to her, had not unoften caused her to turn abruptly away, to hide her tears; and once or twice she had been obliged to quit a theatre to conceal her emotion, when such sentiments were brought too vividly before her. (*Lodore*, 193)

Mary Shelley had good reason to know what it felt like to lose a child, but one reader of *Lodore* believed that the episode alluded to the saddest incident in her own life.

When she read the novel, Claire Clairmont wrote an angry aggrieved letter to her sister:

Good God to think a person of your genius, whose moral tact ought to be proportionately exalted, should think it a task befitting its powers to gild and embellish and pass off as beautiful what was the merest compound of Vanity, folly, and every miserable weakness.²⁷⁷

Claire Clairmont assumed that Shelley had derived the episode from Byron's removal from her of their daughter, Allegra, who, in Shelley's fiction was spared an early death and allowed to grow into adulthood. Her outrage is understandable, because Shelley represents the matter as one in which mother and father are both, if not equally, at fault. But Shelley herself insists that the episode is yet one more consequence of Cornelia's faulty upbringing: 'But through the bad education she had received, and her extreme youth, elevation of feeling degenerated into mere personal pride, and heroism was turned into obstinacy' (*Lodore*, 135). It is her education which is blamed for the fact that she is unable to reach a compromise with her husband that would allow a maternal relationship with her daughter: 'She readily gave into her mother's hands the management of all future intercourse with him, reserving alone, for her own satisfaction, an absolute resolve never to

²⁷⁷ *The Clairmont Correspondence*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking, 2 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 2, 341.

forgive' (*Lodore*, 135). Even when, *Lodore* is dead, and she finds herself living in the same city as her daughter, she makes no effort to get to know her child. The excessive trust she places in her mother makes her unable to trust in every other relationship. She 'renounced friendship' and 'determined not to love' (*Lodore*, 194/95): 'Indifference was her only refuge, and to attain this she must wholly banish his image from her mind' (*Lodore*, 207). This leads to her being perceived as proud on the one hand and as 'false and dangerous' on the other (*Lodore*, 198).

The first time, Cornelia starts to think about the consequences of her actions, and the first time she thinks for herself, is when she finds out that Ethel is engaged to Edward Villiers, whom she knows to be bankrupt. Her first response is still contaminated by her resentment of *Lodore*: "“And for this she has been taken from me,” she thought, “to marry, while yet a child, a ruined man---to be wedded to care and indigence. Thus would it not have been had she been entrusted to me”” (*Lodore*, 231). Her first truly maternal action, ironic as it may seem, is her attempt to separate her daughter from the man that she loves: "“I have done a good deed if I have prevented this marriage,” she thought; “yet a thankless one”” (*Lodore*, 232). Bunnell comments, '[t]his passage reveals Mary Shelley's strong indictment of society's manners that often deny young women or men the chance for love with a partner who is compatible, though not perhaps the most desirable for social advancement'.²⁷⁸ But this is to simplify the complexity of the passage. Only when she visits her daughter who has chosen to join her now husband in his imprisonment for debt does she undergo, perhaps too swiftly and too melodramatically, a thoroughgoing moral transformation:

She was resolved to sacrifice every thing to her daughter---to liberate Villiers, and to establish her in ease and comfort. The image of self-sacrifice, and of the ruin of her own fortunes, was attended with a kind of rapture. She felt as if, in securing Ethel's happiness, she could never feel sorrow more. This was something worth living for: the burden of life was gone---its darkness dissipated---a soft light invested all things, and angels' voices invited her to proceed. (*Lodore*, 366/67)

²⁷⁸ Bunnell, 'The Illusion of "Great Expectations"', 282.

All of a sudden, neither pride, reputation, nor money seem of any value. All that matters is the welfare and love of her daughter: ‘Believe me, I love as much as I admire you; so, in spite of the past, think of me with indulgence and affection’ (*Lodore*, 370). She believes that ‘the knowledge that Ethel is happy through my means will make poverty a blessing’ (*Lodore*, 379). It is a measure of Shelley’s maturity that she represents this state of moral rapture as transitory. Cornelia does not find that her renunciation of self frees her into happiness. Instead, she has to learn the hard lesson that a virtuous decision may be as painful as a vicious one:

It is a hard trial at all times to begin the world anew, even when we exchange a mediocre station for one which our imagination paints as full of enjoyment and distinction. How much more difficult it was for Lady *Lodore* to despoil herself of every good, and voluntarily to encounter poverty in its most unadorned guise. (*Lodore*, 381)

As Bunnell puts it, ‘[i]n contrast to Haywood’s Betsy Thoughtless and Austen’s Emma Woodhouse, who need to moderate their self-will to assimilate into the public sphere, Cornelia needs to exert her will to break free of social hypocrisy’.²⁷⁹ It is paradoxically her daughter through whom she learns how to act and think independently. This change of life also comes with a change of attitude and for the first time Cornelia realizes and is able to admit her own failings: ‘Cornelia had never before felt so sensibly that she had been a wife neglecting her duties, despising a vow she had solemnly pledged, estranging herself from him, who by religious ordinance, and the laws of society, alone had privilege to protect and love her’ (*Lodore*, 439). Nothing suggests that the lesson she learns does not have behind it the full authority of Mary Shelley, though neither in substance nor in expression does it seem a lesson that Mary Shelley’s mother would have found it possible to approve. But for Shelley, the crucial issue is that Cornelia has at last, belatedly achieved moral autonomy: ‘Much wrong have I done, but love pure and disinterested is in my heart, and I shall be

²⁷⁹ Charlene E. Bunnell, ‘The Illusion of “Great Expectations”’, 275.

repaid' (*Lodore*, 444). She does not mean repayment in a material sense. Shelley chooses the word in order to indicate how far Cornelia has diverged from the material, worldly interests that had directed her behaviour until now. For both, mother and daughter, life changes when the domineering parent is removed from their lives and they are consequently forced to live their lives themselves and live with the consequences of their actions. For the first time, they realize that the education that you give yourself is in the end more important than the education you are given. In Cornelia and Ethel's case the outcome is entirely positive: mother and daughter manage to put aside pride as well as prejudice and develop in adulthood the mother-child relationship of which they had been deprived. Bunnell argues that Mary Shelley 'presents Cornelia's history as a persuasive example to convince a conservative readership that women require a sound education to think rationally'.²⁸⁰ It may be so, but it may also be that by 1835 Shelley had more in common with that conservative readership than Bunnell is prepared to admit.

4. 3. 3. Consequences of Fanny's Education

Fanny's education in a quite different way also makes her unfit to enter society:

Such a woman as Fanny was more made to be loved by her own sex than by the opposite one. Superiority of intellect, joined to acquisitions beyond those usual even to men; and both announced with frankness, though without pretension, forms a kind of anomaly little in accord with masculine taste. Fanny could not be the rival of women, and, therefore, all her merits were appreciated by them. (*Lodore*, 317)

Her education results in a '[s]uperiority of intellect' which makes it impossible for her to marry. What man would want to marry a woman who knows more Greek and less about housekeeping than he does? Fanny's education, admirable though it may seem, closely in accord as it is with Mary Wollstonecraft's notions of what female education ought to be, does not prepare her at all to fulfil a woman's role in society. She knows how to argue a point and how to lead a discussion but she knows nothing about the daily duties of a

²⁸⁰ Bunnell, 'Breaking the Tie that Binds', 46.

(house)wife. Fanny is too self-sufficient to appeal to the men of her own day. Unlike Ethel, she does not need a protector; a male guardian would be superfluous for her. She is qualified to win the friendships of women, but one reason that she does so is that she is perceived not to be in competition with them for a mate. The material obstructions to her finding a husband are removed:

Fanny's situation had been beneficially changed. Sir Gilbert Derham, finding that his granddaughter associated with people *in the world*, and being applied to by Lord Maristow, was induced to withdraw Mrs. Derham from her mean situation, and to settle a small fortune on each of her children. (*Lodore*, 409)

But the fortune serves only to free her from the need to become a governess, that is, to 'enter on the career---the only career permitted her sex---of servitude, and yet possess her soul in freedom and power' (*Lodore*, 409). Fanny's fate, unlike Ethel's, remains unresolved. But it is interesting that the novel ends not with Ethel, Shelley's most Victorian heroine, but with Fanny, a character of a kind that Victorian novelists found almost impossible to accommodate within their works:

[...] she will turn neither to the right nor left, but pursue her way unflinching; and in her lofty idea of the dignity of her nature, in her love of truth and in her integrity she will find support and reward in her various fortunes. What the events are that have already diversified her existence, cannot now be recounted; and it would require the gift of prophecy to foretell the conclusion. (*Lodore*, 448)

Fanny's future is absent from the novel not because of lack of space but because Mary Shelley recognizes it as the kind of life that only the future can realize, the kind of life that will become possible only when social forms have been thoroughly reconstituted. Fanny Derham ends the novel because she is a heroine, but the heroine of a novel that cannot yet be written:

In after times these may be told, and the life of Fanny Derham be presented as a useful lesson, at once to teach what goodness and genius can achieve in palliating the woes of life, and to encourage those, who would in any way imitate her, by an example of calumny refuted by patience, errors rectified by charity, and the passions of our nature purified and ennobled by an undeviating observance of those moral

laws on which all human excellence is founded---a love of truth in ourselves, and a sincere sympathy with our fellow-creatures. (*Lodore*, 448)

Fanny Derham is Shelley's tribute to her mother, and to her mother's notions about women's education but also, perhaps, a response to a woman who had written to her in 1827, introducing herself as an admirer of Shelley's mother. Frances Wright wrote to express her admiration for Shelley's mother and to enlist Shelley's support for her social experiments. Shelley was clearly fascinated by Frances Wright, at once admiring and appalled by her uncompromising commitment to realizing her own social ideals.²⁸¹ Like her namesake Fanny Derham, she seems to have arrived at the conclusion that Frances Wright was a heroine trying to live in the present a life that could be realized only in the future.

Fanny and Ethel are the secret and the apparent heroines of the novel, and they are established by their contrast one with another:

It was singular that the resolute and unshrinking Fanny should be the daughter of Francis Derham; and the timid, retiring Ethel, of his bold and daring protector. But this is no uncommon case. We feel the evil results of our own faults, and endeavour to guard our children from them. [...] In spite of the great contrast thus exhibited between Ethel and Fanny, one quality created a good deal of similarity between them. There was in both a total absence of every factitious sentiment. (*Lodore*, 323)

Their differences are in the end less important than their similarities: 'A feeling of duty ruled all their actions; and, however excellent a person's dispositions may be, it yet requires considerable elevation of character never to deviate from the strict line of honour and integrity' (*Lodore*, 323/24). They constitute, as it were, the two halves of a female psyche that in 1835, according to Mary Shelley, could not yet be joined.

²⁸¹ On Fanny Wright, see Celia Morris Eckhardt, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1984).

4. 4. Conclusion

Unlike her mother and other writers on the subject of female education, Mary Shelley does not try to resolve this conflict in her novel. What she does, however, through Ethel, and also through Cornelia Santerre, Ethel's mother, is to point out that women cannot rely on the education that they have been given but that at some point they need to take their lives into their own hands. Even Fanny shows us that the seemingly desirable male education that she has enjoyed does not suffice for happiness. That must await a change in society that Mary Shelley does not believe is possible in any immediate future. Mary Shelley seems neither to privilege the idea of a perfect male-fashioned female being, who, like Frankenstein's creature, is not equipped to function in human society, but who unlike the monster attracts rather than alienates her fellows, nor the idea of a woman who has received an education that allows her to disregard the difference between the genders. Bunnell comments, 'In *Lodore*, Mary Shelley exposes the artificiality of social roles and criticizes the reductive education that children, particularly girls, so often receive, an education that ill-prepares them for life's unexpected events'.²⁸² This is true, but in itself inadequate, because Shelley makes it clear that there is no kind of education that could adequately prepare women to enter the world as it was then constituted. The most that can be expected is that women make the best they can of the imperfect educations that their society affords them, and achieve in spite of rather than because of those educations the measure of moral autonomy that is necessary if human life is to achieve dignity.

Ethel and Cornelia are both the products of the education that a parent has given them. Lady Santerre uses her influence over her daughter to detach her from her own husband, Lord Lodore separates Ethel from her mother, and gives her an education that makes her completely dependent on a guardian. Neither woman is encouraged to think or act for herself, and yet both manage to escape from their educations. Ethel's will proves in

²⁸² Bunnell, 'Breaking the Tie that Binds', 50.

the end stronger than her inclination to obey her husband, and Cornelia takes her life into her own hands and sells everything she owns in order to support her daughter and her impoverished husband. In these acts both characters achieve independence, and at the same time they make possible their reunion with each other. As a consequence, I cannot agree with Vargo, when she suggests that ‘the novel proposes egalitarian educational paradigms for women and men, which would bring social justice as well as the spiritual and intellectual means by which to meet the challenges life invariably brings’.²⁸³ What Mary Shelley rather seems to be suggesting is that, no matter what education you receive, it is always up to you to make the most of it. It is a truth that her own life had taught her. It was not simply the education that she received that allowed Mary Shelley to survive what life threw at her, particularly the loss of her mother at her birth and of her husband before she was twenty-five. Certainly, she grew up surrounded by books and taught herself (with the help of her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley) Latin and Greek, but true to what she proposes in *Lodore*, she also demonstrated the capacity to make an independent life for herself: her novel *Lodore* is both an oblique record and a strong evidence of that achievement.

²⁸³ Lisa Vargo, ‘*Lodore* and the “Novel of Society”’, 426.

5. *Falkner*

As Sharon Jowell notes, ‘both *Lodore* and *Falkner* received high praise from the critics when they were initially published’,²⁸⁴ but they have been less well received by modern readers. Modern critics ‘see the late novels fulfilling one of two agendas, either as a vehicle of atonement for past transgressions or a means of satisfying [Shelley’s] financial needs by pleasing both the book-buying public and Sir Timothy Shelley’.²⁸⁵ Even critics who have represented the earlier fiction as radical, are given pause by her final two novels. As Julia Saunders observes, ‘[f]or many [modern] critics, the later works of Shelley represent an ideological retreat from her bold, speculative writing of the 1820s in which she confidently tackled themes as ambitious as world government, science and history’.²⁸⁶ Mary Poovey represents *Falkner* as surrendering at once to the demands of public opinion and the pressures of the market. For her the novel is ‘carefully calculated to win public respect and economic returns – designed, that is, to earn acceptance by the society she had once defied and whose rejection was now proving so painful and so crippling’.²⁸⁷ But this negative consensus has itself been challenged. Lisa Hopkins argues that *Falkner* is ‘a fitting culmination to [Mary Shelley’s] oeuvre’, rather than a palinode to it:

it brings together a number of themes and concerns, of her previous fiction: it shares with *Frankenstein* the heroine’s name, Elizabeth, the images of a bride dead in a storm, of a devilish male, and of pale faces lit by lightning, and a concern with the mother’s grave and the fate of a dead body; with *Lodore* an ostensibly redemptive portrait of motherhood; and with *The Last Man* a significant forgetfulness.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Sharon L. Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers: The Weak, the Absent, and the Silent in *Lodore* and *Falkner*’, *European Romantic Review* Vol. 8 No.3, 1997, 299.

²⁸⁵ Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers’, 298.

²⁸⁶ Julia Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, in *Mary Shelley’s Novels from *Frankenstein* to *Falkner**, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), 211.

²⁸⁷ Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago, Ill; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 158.

²⁸⁸ Lisa Hopkins, ‘“A Medea, in More Senses than the More Obvious One”: Motherhood in Mary Shelley’s *Lodore* and *Falkner*’, *Eighteenth Century Novel*, Vol. 2, 2002, 397/8.

Julia Saunders argues that the last novels retain a radical cast, even though their radicalism may be more disguised than it is in the earlier fiction: ‘her sentimental romances of the 1830s explore more challenging territory than that normally associated with a feminine courtship novel, smuggling into the drawing room unorthodox ideas in an inoffensive guise’.²⁸⁹

Like Lisa Hopkins, I will argue that in *Falkner* Mary Shelley re-visits the central themes of all her earlier work so comprehensively that, after completing the novel, there was nothing left for her to say. In particular, it is a novel intent on resolving the issues that earlier fictions, both her own and the fictions by others that meant most to her, often left unresolved. In *Falkner*, Shelley revisits and revises her father’s *Caleb Williams*, the novel to which she was throughout her career most indebted, and she revisits, as she had in the earlier novels, her mother’s reforming feminist agenda. It is a novel, then, centrally concerned with the obligations that parents impose on their children. But the issue is addressed in a way that transcends any simply biographical understanding, as Shelley makes clear by indicating so clearly that she wishes her novel to be understood as a re-writing of the tragedy that explores most searchingly the obligations imposed by a parent on a child, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. All her novels are preoccupied with the need to vindicate misunderstood and misrepresented characters, and again it is obvious that the preoccupation has a biographical origin, in the need she felt to vindicate the characters of her mother and her husband. *Falkner* seems especially concerned to challenge the negative view of his wife that Godwin had unintentionally strengthened by publishing his *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Shelley may well have agreed that ‘[t]he deceptively innocuous form of the sentimental romance, dealing with the “female” sphere of courtship, family and domesticity, appears less threatening than the ambitious scope of *Frankenstein*, *The Last*

²⁸⁹ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 221.

Man, and of her earlier histories'.²⁹⁰ She may well have chosen the genre because her contemporary readership found it unthreatening, but it was a genre that enabled her still to engage with the issues that she had addressed throughout her career. I would challenge the view that *Falkner* is 'indicative only of declining and compromised literary talent',²⁹¹ preferring like Betty Bennett to understand it as 'a reversioning of *Frankenstein* that affirms the author's remarkably consistent reformist socio-political ethos'.²⁹² It is the novel in which she engages most transparently with her own experience of growing up motherless without an acceptable female role model, and forming in consequence an excessive attachment to a father.²⁹³ But *Falkner* is a novel that insists on a continuous relationship between the personal and the universal, between a domestic politics in which Elizabeth achieves at last the emotional independence from her adoptive father that allows her to enjoy a loving, companionate marriage, and a state politics in which her adoptive father engages in the Greek struggle to win independence from its Ottoman rulers and almost dies for the cause.

5. 1. *Falkner* and Biography

Falkner, like Mary Shelley's earlier novels, opens itself to a biographical reading.

When Mary Shelley's heroine haunts the grave of her mother, she inevitably brings to mind one of the better known anecdotes of Shelley's childhood:

Save on that day, none ever visited or wandered among the graves, with the one exception of a child, who had early learned to mourn, yet whose infantine mind could scarcely understand the extent of the cause she had for tears. A little girl, unnoticed and alone, was wont, each evening, to trip over the sands – to scale, with light steps, the cliff of no gigantic height, and then, unlatching the low, white gate of the church-yard, to repair to one corner, where the boughs of the nearest trees shadowed over two graves – two graves, of which one only was distinguished by a

²⁹⁰ Saunders, 'Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 221.

²⁹¹ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 299.

²⁹² Betty T. Bennett, "Not this time Victor", 1.

²⁹³ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 314.

simple headstone, to commemorate the name of him who mouldered beneath. This tomb was inscribed to the memory of Edwin Raby, but the neighbouring and less honoured grave claimed more of the child's attention – for her mother lay beneath the unrecorded turf.²⁹⁴

It is hard not to recall Mary Shelley's own childhood trips to her mother's grave where she claims to have learned her alphabet by tracing the letters on the grave stone.²⁹⁵ Like Elizabeth Raby, Mary Shelley spent many an hour at her mother's grave. As Sharon Jowell acknowledges, 'the autobiographical note cannot be ignored'.²⁹⁶ The novel's hero, Gerard Neville, like the heroes of all the novels written after Percy Shelley's death, seems transparently to function as an idealised portrait of Mary's beloved husband. Neville is a character wild at heart, rebelling against his strict and unloving father and yet also soft and kind, who does not really seem to belong to this world. It is significant that he introduces Elizabeth to 'the writings of a younger, but divine race of poets' (*Falkner*, Vol. II, 63), amongst whom Shelley and Byron would clearly have featured prominently. In one rather curious aspect, Alithea, Falkner's mother, closely resembles Mary Shelley herself. Alithea is closely attached to her son, while her daughter seems to play no significant role in her life. As Lisa Hopkins suggests:

Perhaps part of this difference in Alithea's parenting of her son and her daughter may be ascribed to the extent to which she is a composite representation of the different phases of Mary Shelley's own life. Mary Wollstonecraft, however guiltlessly, left behind a daughter; Mary Shelley too lost daughters – one of them, like Alithea's, never named – but she could, by this stage in her life, reasonably claim that she had successfully brought up a son.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Falkner; A Novel; By The Author of "Frankenstein"*, 3 vols, (London : Saunders and Otley, 1837), Vol. I, 7.

²⁹⁵ See Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Baltimore: Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 26.

²⁹⁶ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 314.

²⁹⁷ Hopkins, "A Medea, in More Senses than the More Obvious One", 401.

Elizabeth's grandfather Oswi Raby more clearly than any character in the earlier novels seems to be presented rather transparently as a portrait of Sir Timothy Shelley, as Betty Bennett points out: '[Elizabeth's] mother struggles on, refusing to comply with Edwin's father's stipulation that he would support the child only if he were given complete custody, an experience directly drawn from Mary Shelley's early negotiations with P. B. Shelley's father.'²⁹⁸ The novel also includes general reflections that seem to invite the reader to recognize their particular application to Mary Shelley's personal experience:

In after years – when death has bereaved us of the dearest – when cares, and regrets, and fears, and passions, evil either in their nature or their results, have stained our lives with black, solitude is too sadly peopled to be pleasing; and when we see one of mature years alone, we believe that sadness must be the companion. But the solitary thoughts of the young are glorious dreams. (*Falkner*, Vol. I, 173)

Lisa Hopkins voices a no doubt proper suspicion of biographical reading of this kind, aware that such readings have often worked to narrow the significance of writing by women resulting in its being undervalued. She insists that 'for Mary Shelley, these echoes of her own experience do not by any means seem to have provided the main focus of the novel'.²⁹⁹ But by 1837 references to Shelley's private life resonate very differently from their resonance in 1826 when Shelley published *The Last Man*. By 1837 her husband had become a famous poet, a poet with whose work Shelley could expect her readers to be familiar. In the earlier novels she quotes her husband's poems as part of her campaign to win for his work the attention that she believed it to deserve, but her references to the poems in 1837 are quite different. She writes that to Falkner 'might be applied the figure of the poet, who represented himself as hunted by his own thoughts – pursued by memory, and torn to pieces, as Actaeon by his own hounds' (*Falkner*, Vol. 1, 44). She proudly assumes that the reference to *Adonais*, 276-9, by this date did not need to be explained. The poem had after all been re-published by a group of Cambridge poets, amongst them

²⁹⁸ Betty Bennett, "Not this time Victor", 9.

²⁹⁹ Hopkins, "A Medea, in more senses than the more obvious one", 385.

Arthur Hallam and Tennyson,³⁰⁰ whose methods of distribution, though unconventional, were ingenious. Hallam reported that he had ‘made a convert to Shelley on the Glasgow steamboat, and presented him with a copy of *Adonais* as a badge of proselytism’.³⁰¹ When Elizabeth hurries away from the fashionable society that she finds tedious, “‘There was a spirit in her feet,’” and she could not stay, but hurried out into the woodland dells’ (*Falkner*, Vol.I, 256). Again she expects her reader to recognize the line from ‘The Indian Serenade’ even though she adapts it. The poem had, after she had included it in the *Posthumous Poems* of 1824, become one of P. B. Shelley’s most celebrated lyrics. In 1826 when Lord Raymond escapes from his domestic difficulties by enlisting in the Greek War of Independence, the allusion to Byron was already publicly available. In 1837, two years after the publication of Thomas Moore’s *Life*, when Falkner seeks to assuage his own guilt by enlisting in the same conflict the parallel with Byron was still more publicly evident. The name Mary Shelley’s Elizabeth is born with, Raby, is again a public tribute to Byron’s very last heroine, Aurora Raby, who is, like Elizabeth, an orphan:

Rich, noble, but an orphan, left an only
 Child to the care of guardians good and kind,
 But still her aspect had an air so lonely!
 Blood is not water; and where shall we find
 Feelings of youth like those which overthrown lie
 By death, when we are left, alas, behind
 To feel in friendless palaces a home
 Is wanting and our best ties in the tomb?

Early in years and yet more infantine
 In figure, she had something of sublime
 In eyes which sadly shone, as seraphs’ shine.
 All youth but with an aspect beyond time,
 Radiant and grave, as pitying man’s decline,
 Mournful, but mournful of another’s crime,
 She looked as if she sat by Eden’s door
 And grieved for those who could return no more.

³⁰⁰ The edition is described by Ruth S. Graniss, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the First Editions in Book Form of the Writings of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York: Folcroft Library, 1923), 72-3.

³⁰¹ Letter to Richard Monckton Milnes, Inverary July 21st [1829], in *The Letters of Arthur Henry Hallam*, ed. Jack Kolb (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981), pp. 299-302, 301.

She was a Catholic too, sincere, austere,
 As far as her own gentle heart allowed,
 And deemed that fallen worship far more dear
 Perhaps because 'twas fallen. Her sires were proud
 Of deeds and days when they had filled the ear
 Of nations and had never bent or bowed
 To novel power; and as she was the last,
 She held their old faith and old feelings fast.

She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew
 As seeking not to know it. Silent, lone,
 As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew
 And kept her heart serene within its zone.
 There was awe in the homage which she drew;
 Her spirit seemed as seated on a throne
 Apart from the surrounding world and strong
 In its own strength, most strange in one so young. (*Don Juan*, 15, 44-7)

But by 1837 the accidental drowning of Alithea Neville could itself carry public resonances; to P. B. Shelley's own accidental drowning, but also perhaps to Mary Wollstonecraft's failed attempt to drown herself when she was disappointed in love, and even to Harriet Shelley's suicide in the Serpentine. By 1837 many of Mary Shelley's family had become public figures, their lives as well as their writings widely known. *Falkner* is a novel that insists that the private life and the public life are continuous. It was a perception that had almost been forced on Mary Shelley, and it is a perception that she weaves into the very fabric of her final novel.

While Mary Shelley was working on the manuscript of *Falkner*, her father died, bequeathing her the task of writing his memoirs, a project for which he left extensive notes. Shelley only managed to complete a few pages which can now be found in the Abinger collection of the Bodleian Library in Oxford.³⁰² The surviving fragment of her memoir of Percy Bysshe Shelley itself begins with the words '[a]mong the literary & political celebrities (writers) of the 18th century an eminent place is due to William Godwin'.³⁰³ Mary Shelley recognised an obligation to write the biographies of her father

³⁰² MS Abinger c. 62.

³⁰³ MS Abinger e. 52; formerly dep. e. 288.

and of her husband. She failed in both duties, and that failure is, I will suggest, central to *Falkner*, a novel which is centrally concerned with the duty acknowledged by Gerard Neville to vindicate the character of his dead mother, and the duty that Elizabeth accepts to vindicate her father when he is charged with murder. It is a point that has been anticipated by Graham Allen, who argues that '*Falkner*, in ways more significant than the literal, is *about* the "Life of William Godwin"; or rather, it is *about* the problems (discursive, social, private) confronted by the author of that later fragment'.³⁰⁴ In *Falkner*, Shelley seized the opportunity to write a disguised memoir of her father without destroying his reputation, which had been the unfortunate, though unintended, consequence of Godwin's own project of memorialising his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, by writing a memoir of her. As Allen argues, '*Falkner*, we might say, lives up to Godwin's ideas about biography, since it represents a more successful (more fideistic) history than, as Shelley knew, any memoir can'.³⁰⁵ In *Falkner*, in the character of Elizabeth Falkner, as she had in *Lodore* in the character of Ethel Lodore, Shelley directly confronts what she recognised in her journal as the problem at the centre of her own emotional life, an excessive attachment to her father, a point well made by Sharon Jowell.³⁰⁶ Elizabeth, unlike Ethel, is only her father's adopted child, and it may be that by freeing the relationship, at least technically, of the threat of incest, Mary Shelley is able to reflect on her relationship with her own father more searchingly. But Jowell is right to argue that in her two last novels Shelley is at least as anxious to escape from her relationship with her own father as to explore it:

Yet while Ethel Lodore and Elizabeth Falkner enjoyed the total possession of their fathers, Mary Shelley's inability to possess Godwin completely is the antithesis of the idyllic father-daughter relationships she depicts in her late novels. Mary Shelley unconsciously compensated for Godwin's real-life failings, in an example of Freudian wish fulfilment in both *Lodore* and *Falkner*.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Graham Allen, 'Public and Private Fidelity: Mary Shelley's 'Life of William Godwin' and *Falkner*', in *Mary Shelley's Fictions from Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 237.

³⁰⁵ Allen, 'Public and Private Fidelity', 241.

³⁰⁶ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 303.

³⁰⁷ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 303.

It has been argued that ‘her literary life as a novelist came to an end with the passing of the other’,³⁰⁸ that is, with Godwin’s death, but it may be that it came to an end because in *Falkner* she at last succeeded as far as she was able in making sense of her relationship with her father.

Mary Shelley never knew her own mother except through her writings and through William Godwin’s memoir, and in this, too, *Falkner* echoes her own experience: ‘[i]n *Falkner*, as in Shelley’s own life, the character and the history of the mother can only be learnt by reading the father’s textual account’.³⁰⁹ Jowell argues that Mary Shelley, ‘[d]eprived of an appropriate relationship with her own mother, [...] was unable to forge a strong tie with a female role model, the ramifications of which she explores in *Lodore* and *Falkner*’.³¹⁰ All the major characters of the novel, Elizabeth, Falkner and Neville, grow up motherless: ‘[a]ll mothers of any relevance are dead and their children survive without the influence of a maternal figure’.³¹¹ In *Falkner*, Shelley pursues an ‘investigation of the effect of a deceased mother on the child’s psychological health and development, a theme deriving directly from her concern with the deceased Mary Wollstonecraft’.³¹² But Jowell’s conclusion that ‘Mary Shelley uses her writing to recall her own childhood experiences and her repressed wishes’ is unconvincing.³¹³ I would prefer to argue that in *Falkner* Shelley is interested much less narrowly in exploring the condition of motherlessness. Three characters grow up motherless in *Falkner*, and all of them have a different history. Falkner becomes a rebellious youth, unable to control his rage or passions. He leaves home in order to gain a fortune so that he can marry the woman that he loves, finds on his return that she is the married mother of two children, and incurs moral if not criminal

³⁰⁸ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 211.

³⁰⁹ Allen, ‘Public and Private Fidelity’, 237.

³¹⁰ Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers’, 304.

³¹¹ Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers’, 313.

³¹² Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers’, 313.

³¹³ Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers’, 303.

responsibility for her death when he abducts her. After Alithea's death he travels the world in order to avoid detection and in an attempt to escape from his own remorse. He is finally redeemed when he learns to feel for his adopted daughter a kind of love that is uncontaminated by selfishness. Neville, Alithea's son, also loses his mother when he is a child. He becomes like Falkner a rebellious youth, but he is a rebel with a purpose, the vindication of the reputation of his mother, an aim which he finally achieves at the end of the novel. He is saved by his love for Elizabeth, but also because he manages to free his desire for justice from any desire for revenge. Elizabeth's adopted father substitutes for her lost mother so perfectly that she finds great difficulty in allowing herself to accept love when it is offered to her by a young man, Neville, who claims her hand in marriage, but it is a problem that by the end of the novel she has resolved. It may be true that 'in crafting the characters of Elizabeth Raby and Gerard Neville to feel complete devotion to the deceased mother figure, Mary Shelley allows herself to remember and work through in a Freudian sense her own feelings for Mary Wollstonecraft'.³¹⁴ It may equally be the case that 'Mary Shelley appears vicariously to communicate with her own deceased mother through the character of Elizabeth'.³¹⁵ One can accept with Emily Sunstein that 'Elizabeth Raby's idealization of her dead mother, like Gerard Neville's absolute devotion to vindicating the reputation of his mother, seems autobiographical in origin'.³¹⁶ But she does much more than this. As Graham Allen points out, the account that Falkner writes in the hope that it will palliate the reader's sense of his guilt reveals a confidence as misplaced as that displayed by Godwin when he composed his memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft:

Like Godwin, Falkner misjudges the effect his narrative will produce . . . Falkner's narrative itself centres on the events which have led up to the defamation of the mother's name; it tells of the father's part in that traumatic event. Written as a kind

³¹⁴ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 302.

³¹⁵ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 314.

³¹⁶ Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, 36.

of suicide note while Falkner seeks death in the Greek Wars of Independence, it is a text which, like all texts, takes on new significance in new contexts.³¹⁷

This is well said, but Falkner's narrative has just as close a relationship with another narrative designed at once as a confession and as a self-vindication, the missing manuscript at the centre of Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, the narrative that Caleb comes to believe that Falkner's near namesake, Falkland, had concealed in the iron chest. As Ranita Chatterjee observes, 'Shelley no doubt felt the burden, if not to agree with, at least to sustain a more complex picture of Wollstonecraft's life and writings'.³¹⁸ As Graham Allen puts it:

Falkner's narrative reverses the reception of Godwin's *Memoir of Wollstonecraft*. It performs that most difficult of all authorial tasks: the public narrating of a life which does not betray the subject into a reversal of its true identity, which manages to retain the coincidence between the name and its bodily referent.³¹⁹

But Chatterjee and Allen both risk presenting Mary Shelley's last novel as if it were simply therapeutic. To recognize that she alludes not only to a historical narrative, Godwin's *Memoir*, but to a fictional narrative, Falkland's account of his crime, is to recognize that Mary Shelley is interested not just in the obligation she felt towards her parents but in exploring the nature of narrative itself, and the responsibilities that it entails. As Betty Bennett argues:

The analogous rules of personal experiences, reshaped into the art of writing about large societal issues in both *Frankenstein* and *Falkner*, speak to the author's self-confidence in projecting the microcosm of her own intellectual vision into the landscape of her art and obviate a reductive reading of the novel as a *roman à clef*, an interpretation that invariably has critically circumscribed that vision.³²⁰

Just as in *Perkin Warbeck* Shelley re-writes history by postulating the legitimacy of Perkin's claim to the throne, in *Falkner* she re-writes a more personal history. When

³¹⁷ Allen, 'Public and Private Fidelity', 237-8.

³¹⁸ Ranita Chatterjee, 'Filial Ties: Godwin's *Deloraine* and Mary Shelley's Writings', *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 18 No. 1, January 2007, 39.

³¹⁹ Allen, 'Public and Private Fidelity', 238/9.

³²⁰ Betty Bennett, "Not this time Victor", 9.

Neville and Falkner overcome their differences and learn to live together in amity, Shelley is clearly re-writing the troubled relationship between her father and her husband that had been so painful for her. When Elizabeth travels to Falkner's sickbed in mainland Greece and transports him to the island where, nursed by her, he regains his health, she is again intervening in history, imaginatively undoing the death of Byron, who had perished of a fever while fighting for Greek independence in 1824. In *The Last Man*, Mary Shelley also sends women to intervene to prevent the death of the Byronic Lord Raymond, but as Melissa Sites notes, although Raymond recovers from a dangerous illness, he perishes in the explosion that destroys Constantinople.³²¹ *Falkner* is a novel in which Shelley effects an imaginative reunion of Godwin, Byron and Shelley, all of whom by the time she completed the novel were dead. It is a reunion from which no-one is excluded except for her mother, whom even in her imagination she could not raise from the dead, since she had never known her. She could not bring her mother back to life but she could at least restore her reputation.

5. 2. Education in *Falkner*

As in all her novels, education is an important theme in *Falkner*, it being one of Shelley's central beliefs that character is determined by education, and in particular by early education. In consequence she offers a detailed description of the education of the three central characters; Falkner, Neville and Elizabeth. Rupert Falkner is an unruly youth. Julia Saunders comments, '[t]he blame for this fault is placed squarely in the sad circumstances of Falkner's upbringing. The root of evil in the environment of Falkner's youth is inherited wealth'.³²² This is only partly true. Although Mary Shelley indicates that Falkner's upbringing is responsible for the way his character is formed, it is only in adulthood that

³²¹ Melissa Sites, 'Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 54, 2005, n158/9.

³²² Saunders, 'Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 217.

Falkner inherits an estate, being born only as the son of a younger son with no great income and an expensive gambling habit. It is much more the lack of a loving environment and of a proper education that has embittered Falkner. So, although Saunders argues that ‘Falkner remains essentially the child of his aristocratic upbringing – reckless and violent’, I would counter that his character is deformed by his treatment by society and in particular by his father.³²³ Saunders accepts that ‘[t]his story of the perversion of an essentially good character [...] finds many echoes in Godwin’s work, particularly in *Caleb Williams* and *St Leon*’,³²⁴ to which she might have added Mary Shelley’s own *Frankenstein. St Leon* is, of course, also a thematical inspiration for Shelley’s short Story ‘The Mortal Immortal’. The character of Falkner offers yet another demonstration of the belief that was central both to Mary Shelley’s thought and her father’s, that ‘it was the system that made the man’.³²⁵ In the end Falkner does not receive an aristocratic but a military education. Its limitations are corrected when he is exposed to the influence of Alithea and her mother. For the first time since the death of his own mother, he enjoys a loving environment. Falkner has great natural gifts, but they are undeveloped and undisciplined: his ‘mind was strong in its own elements, but these lay scattered, and somewhat chaotic. His observation was keen, and his imagination fervid; but it was inborn, uncultivated, and unenriched by any vast stores of reading’ (*Falkner*, Vol. I, 113). It is pointed out several times throughout the novel that Falkner’s education is far surpassed by Elizabeth’s, but it is not only in book learning that he is deficient. When returning from India, he is not capable of understanding that Alithea might choose not to leave her husband for the sake of her children. Falkner simply ‘does not allow Alithea the choice of staying in her bad marriage, even though he recognizes “the

³²³ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 217.

³²⁴ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 218.

³²⁵ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 218.

delicate forbearance that filled her noble mind”³²⁶ For him, staying married to a person that one does not love seems as clearly wrong as it had seemed to Shelley’s husband:

I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise commend
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
Of modern morals . . . (*Epipsychidion*, 150-5)

It is the principle on which she and Shelley had themselves acted when they ran away together, abandoning Shelley’s first wife and the mother of his two children. But it was a principle, it seems, that could not survive Mary Shelley’s own experience of motherhood. It is as a direct if unintended result of Falkner’s selfish actions that Alithea dies. Falkner conceals the body, burying it in an unmarked grave, not out of simple cowardice but from a fear of disgrace that brings him very close to Godwin’s Falkland. Like Falkland, as Kate Ellis points out, he acts in obedience to a false masculine code: ‘Falkner’s version of the masculine code of honor requires that he torture himself to the point where his will to live can be sustained only by the constant presence of Elizabeth’.³²⁷ His life is saved by Elizabeth for the first time when she saves her mother’s grave from being insulted by his suicide and thus also saves his life. Elizabeth soon comes to love the stranger and loves him for who he is, her benefactor, and her adoptive father. Through Elizabeth, Falkner regains the intimacy with a woman that he had lost when Alithea died, an intimacy without which, Shelley suggests, masculinity is warped. An important aim of education, in Mary Shelley’s eyes is that men should be encouraged to cultivate their more feminine traits and women in their turn should become more practically educated. So, ‘when [Elizabeth] falls ill, “[n]o mother could have attended on her more assiduously than Falkner” (35). Gerard,

³²⁶ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 162.

³²⁷ Kate Ferguson Ellis, ‘*Falkner* and Other Fictions’, in *Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159.

too, is said to have “grown kind as a woman” (86).³²⁸ Shelley presents womanliness as an ideal towards which both sexes should aspire. She insists on separating gender from sex.

Throughout the novel, Falkner relapses into moods in which he feels the need to punish himself but Elizabeth interferes on several occasions, on each persuading him not to take his own life. Through her and the purpose she gives his life, Falkner becomes a better person. He ‘begins as a Byronic hero – like Lodore, Victor Frankenstein, Castruccio, or Raymond, hyper-masculine, aloof, pained, defensive, and self-destructive – and then ‘undergoes not only a mental but a physical transformation from the Byronic to the Shelleyan type’.³²⁹ It takes the whole novel for him to arrive at this point but in the end he submits to Elizabeth’s wishes, overcomes his pride and makes his peace with Neville who indirectly is the victim of his crimes. The task of the male characters in the novel, as Melissa Sites argues, is to acquire slowly and painfully feminine virtues:

The reformation of Falkner must not be understood as a punishment of the father. Instead it must be seen alongside the reformation of Neville (and even the deathbed repentance of Sir Boyvill) as exemplifying the potential for forgiveness, justice, and Godwinian perfectibility. The ability of masculine heroes like Falkner to purge their impetuous and essentially selfish belief-structures, and instead to embody the gentler virtues traditionally associated with women, is key to the possibility of social reform Mary Shelley models in *Falkner*.³³⁰

Falkner’s self-education is complete when he learns fully to place the happiness of another person, Elizabeth, before his own happiness. It is the capacity that in Falkner is strongly associated with motherhood, but it is a novel in which the men, far more pressingly than the women, need to acquire the maternal virtues.

Gerard Neville’s education parallels Falkner’s. It takes the whole novel for him to acquire an independent self. His home after his mother’s death is dominated by a loveless father who is hurt in his own pride. Gerard’s presence, by reminding him of his wife, is an

³²⁸ Hopkins, “A Medea, in More Senses than the More Obvious One”, 399.

³²⁹ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 171.

³³⁰ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 172.

aggravation to him. The tutor that he employs shares his lack of sympathy for the boy. As Sites points out, Neville survives this treatment through the benign influence of women: ‘Neville’s good qualities are the product of his own “better nature,” but also of a careful education- the early loving treatment of his mother and the care taken by his step-sister Lady Cecil to retrieve him from the bad treatment he suffered at the hands of his father’.³³¹ It is only when he acquires a stepsister that he realizes the worth of a proper education. It is then that his educational journey begins but he has a long way to go until he arrives where Mary Shelley would have all mankind arrive. Neville is driven by his desire to vindicate his mother’s name. This is the only ambition of any importance in his life, and it also presents him with his greatest dilemma. While travelling in order to find and expose his mother’s murderer, he meets and falls in love with Elizabeth. Elizabeth is Falkner’s (adopted) daughter and Falkner is the man indirectly responsible for Neville’s mother’s death. Once Neville discovers this, the social etiquette that Shelley represents as still prevailing amongst gentlemen would dictate that he challenge Falkner to a duel. A continuing relationship with Elizabeth would only be proper were she to return to her biological family and give up any contact with Falkner whatsoever. The possibility of the challenge is removed by Neville’s father who insists that Falkner be tried for murder. Shelley accepts, as her father had accepted in *Caleb Williams*, that an aristocratic ethic based on personal honour must give way to a bourgeois ethic that is secured by the rule of law, although she seems no longer to share her father’s suspicions of the probity of the legal system that she had expressed so strongly in *Frankenstein*. But agreeing to engage in legal process again makes any contact with Elizabeth, who insists on remaining with her father, even joining him in his prison cell, socially unacceptable. Yet in the end, like Falkner, Neville manages to win free from the conventional masculine code:

Gerard turns the courtroom into the jousting field, creating for himself a satisfying language in which to excuse and explain his decision. He adapts the conventions of

³³¹ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 160.

the past to the needs of an unconventional present. In doing so, he demonstrates how traditions can be made to serve the needs of the present generation.³³²

Gerard performs a knightly duty in vindicating the reputation of his mother, but he contrives to do this while at the same time recognising that his honour is involved in assisting Falkner to establish his innocence of the criminal charge that has been brought against him. He finds a way of resolving his dilemma by serving at once the two women that he loves, his mother, and Elizabeth, the woman that he wishes to marry. As Sites points out, ‘Mary Shelley’s revision of the ideal masculine Romantic hero reaches its apex in the Shelleyan portrait of Gerard Neville’: the key terms associated with Neville, “[s]ensibility, genius, and love,” are strong code words identifying Neville as a Shelleyan hero- still passionate, but without the dangerously self-centred turn of the Byronic hero’.³³³

Neville, like Falkner, undergoes a trial by fire, purging away his savage aspects, turning his energies from self-destruction to active goodness. We see most closely into his psychological workings, learning of his struggles to re-adjust his belief systems away from the worldly code, and toward justice, even when this shift affects him in the most personal way. Neville triumphs as a Shelleyan Romantic hero because he is able to allow his qualities of “sensibility, genius, and love” to come to the forefront and rule his character, resulting in his utopian union with Elizabeth, the real hero of *Falkner*. In achieving the capacity for forgiveness, Neville understands true justice and is enabled to help create utopian domesticity.³³⁴

Godwin’s first novel had investigated ‘Things as they are’. *Falkner*, as Ellis argues, is concerned with ‘men as they are’: ‘The “men as they are” in *Falkner*, as in the rest of Shelley’s fiction, claim to be concerned with lofty values such as peace, justice, and the welfare of others. But left to their own devices, they remain mired in an egocentricity reinforced by their culture’s definitions of masculinity.’³³⁵

Elizabeth, because she provides herself the vital connection between Neville and Falkner, is the central character of the novel. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her novel fragment

³³² Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 219.

³³³ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 170-1.

³³⁴ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 171.

³³⁵ Ellis, ‘*Falkner* and Other Fictions’, 159.

Maria, seems to suggest that women must learn endurance rather than expect enjoyment: ‘the best that can be hoped from life is to learn self-control, self-denial and to bear disappointment’.³³⁶ In *Falkner*, Mary Shelley amends this view by insisting that women have the right to look forward to happiness. Elizabeth’s happiness is founded on her very thorough education: ‘Elizabeth learns diversified habits of study similar to Mary Shelley’s own and is regarded with wonder and admiration by Falkner, who is himself less learned than Elizabeth.’³³⁷ But Shelley ‘creates in Elizabeth a heroine who could not be faulted by traditional critics for any lack of “womanly” skills’.³³⁸ Elizabeth is taught by a governess as well as by Falkner:

She learned from Falkner the uses of learning: from Miss Jervis she acquired the thoughts and experience of other men. Like all young and ardent minds, which are capable of enthusiasm, she found infinite delight in the pages of ancient history: she read biography, and speedily found models for herself, whereby she measured her own thoughts and conduct, rectifying her defects, and aiming at the honour and generosity which made her heart beat, and cheeks glow, when narrated of others. (*Falkner*, Vol. I, 114)

In this paragraph Shelley seems to summarise a rather masculine education, similar to Fanny Derham’s education in *Lodore* which is also presided over by a father. Yet she combines this masculine education with the cultivation of feminine accomplishments: ‘needlework went into her plan of education, as well as the careful inculcation of habits of neatness and order; and thus Elizabeth escaped for ever the danger she had hitherto run of wanting those feminine qualities without which every woman must be unhappy – and to a certain degree unsexed’ (*Falkner*, Vol. I., 117). It is a revealing expression given that her own mother had been a principal target of Richard Polwhele’s virulent satire of 1798, *The Unsex’d Females*. In *Lodore*, Ethel’s wholly ‘sexual’ education fits her to be a bride, but does so by making her wholly reliant on masculine superintendence in all the practical

³³⁶ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 213.

³³⁷ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 152.

³³⁸ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 154.

aspects of life. Fanny's education equips her to live an independent life, but such a life for a woman in the early nineteenth century is doomed to be solitary. The novel sketches a dilemma that in *Falkner* Shelley resolves. Elizabeth is capable of decisive, masculine activity, as when she travels to Falkner's sickbed through a war-torn Greece, and arranges his passage to the island on which he recovers his health, as when she makes the decision to attend Falkner in prison and travels on her own to Carlisle to do so, and as when she contemplates travelling alone to America to find the witness who will secure Falkner's acquittal. But her masculine decisiveness co-exists with a womanly sense that her only happiness lies in relationship, and relationship with a man, first with Falkner and then with Neville.

Elizabeth's character has prompted critical disagreement. Jowell argues that 'Elizabeth's lack of independence is the direct result of her inability to identify with an appropriate female role model. Maternal absence has caused her to rely heavily on the paternal figure and this has stunted her emotional growth.'³³⁹ Sites on the other hand stresses her capacity for independent action: 'Actually, Elizabeth has not been silent or passive: she has strongly protested Falkner's intent (to die honorably in the war) and has insisted that she accompany him to Greece.'³⁴⁰ As Sites observes, 'Elizabeth is much less a bending reed than Ethel; although she embodies the "womanly virtues" admired by Mary Shelley, she possesses an independent mind and the ability to formulate and adhere to her own plan of action.'³⁴¹ I would prefer to argue that Elizabeth's peculiar authority derives from her finding a way to cultivate simultaneously a feminine dependence and a masculine independence.

In *Falkner* Shelley insists, as her father and husband had done that we are what we make of ourselves rather than what we were born. Her very first novel, *Frankenstein*, had

³³⁹ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 319.

³⁴⁰ Sites, 'Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 156.

³⁴¹ Sites, 'Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 158.

vigorously offered its support to the priority of nurture over nature, and her last novel makes the point no less emphatically. Ties of kinship are consistently subordinated to ties that are chosen. As Saunders puts it, ‘Shelley replaces blood with gratitude. This quality rules the moral world of the novel from the frontispiece quotation to the conclusion of the tale’.³⁴² There are other well educated women in the novel, for instance Lady Cecil or Mrs. Raby: ‘[b]oth these women have many admirable qualities, but, unlike Elizabeth, they are unable at this point in the story to rise above the conditioning of their upbringing’.³⁴³ That is the quality that Elizabeth displays when she claims Falkner as her father even when she is reacquainted with her biological family. When Falkner offers to restore her to her family, Elizabeth objects, “‘You have earned me – you have bought me by all this kindness, and you must not cast me away’” (*Falkner*, Vol. I, 155). Her economic metaphors are shocking, but she uses them as a way of rejecting Falkner’s notion that he would wrong her if he prevented her from being received into her wealthy biological family. Falkner has bought her not with his money but with his love. When Neville chooses to repudiate the vengefulness of his own father and actively to assist Falkner in proving his innocence of murder, he proves himself worthy of Elizabeth by showing that like her he values ties of blood less highly than ties of affection. In the novel’s conclusion it is Elizabeth’s values that are triumphant: ‘What distinguishes the Elizabeth of *Falkner* not only from her predecessors but from *all* of Shelley’s earlier heroines, is that her point of view prevails’.³⁴⁴

Her upbringing has been unorthodox and has freed her to act from conviction rather than convention. Filial duty in her understanding is something which is earned by the parent, and is not the result of biology.³⁴⁵

³⁴² Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 214.

³⁴³ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 214.

³⁴⁴ Ellis, ‘*Falkner* and Other Fictions’, 152.

³⁴⁵ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 214/5.

In this she coincides with Mary Wollstonecraft who in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* claims that not only do children have duties towards their parents but also vice versa. Elizabeth freely gives what her father has earned from her by his protection and support. Their relationship is ‘a sacred bond she cannot break’.³⁴⁶ So for Elizabeth it is a moral imperative that she join her father in prison rather than seek refuge with her biological family: ‘Gratitude forms ties thicker than blood.’³⁴⁷ Elizabeth is not simply conforming to a conventional feminine code: ‘Rather, what the process shows is that female duties, such as sacrifice and obedience, can be configured into strengths.’³⁴⁸ We are encouraged to admire Elizabeth for her femininity, but also to notice that in her characterization ‘Shelley reinvents the feminine’,³⁴⁹

Shelley’s novels reflect on the power that can be gained for the female through sacrifice and self-control, a truth her mother realized in *Rights of Women*. This is at best a partial kind of freedom, because it is circumscribed by the patriarchal society in which the female lives; but it is – more importantly – a liberty which women may reach without being ostracized from the community.³⁵⁰

In the end Elizabeth contrives it so that she does not have to choose between her father and her lover. Her refusal to choose has been interpreted as an indication of arrested development: ‘Elizabeth is incapable of breaking the father-daughter tie and her dependency on the father-figure continues. She is not an independent agent, has no sense of self, and can only exist within the perimeter of this bizarre triangle.’³⁵¹ But this seems to me to reverse the import of the novel. She does not need to make a choice because she has succeeded in teaching both men in her life to rise above the dictates of society. As Betty Bennett observes, ‘Raby is not only the teacher in the story; teaching and learning are

³⁴⁶ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 215.

³⁴⁷ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 216.

³⁴⁸ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 221.

³⁴⁹ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 221.

³⁵⁰ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 222.

³⁵¹ Jowell, ‘Mary Shelley’s Mothers’, 319.

themselves shifting, communal roles, which further delineate the equality of the sexes rather than subservience on either part'.³⁵² Elizabeth is the most independent character in the novel, because she most completely escapes a restrictive gender position: 'Elizabeth disregards any idea that her sex should determine her actions, and the narrative supports the correctness of her decision:' '[f]idelity, the quality the novel claims as its central concern, is never assigned to one gender or the other and is exemplified equally by Falkner, his adopted daughter Elizabeth, and Gerard Neville'.³⁵³ As Kate Ellis concludes, 'Shelley allows Elizabeth to gain a husband without relinquishing a father, and retain a father without forfeiting a husband. And she does so not by surrendering, but by "subduing" them both to an ethical standard that privileges forgiveness over punishment'.³⁵⁴

Mary Poovey argues that Falkner is a fictional contrivance that allows Mary Shelley to punish her father, just as Elizabeth, for all her pretence of selfless love, works to punish Falkner for his crime, a position also taken by Sharon Jowell when she argues that Elizabeth 'champions Alithea's cause, humiliates Falkner into a confession, and thus punishes him on behalf of all silenced women',³⁵⁵ but it is a novel that, as we shall see, questions the whole rationale of punishment. As Betty Bennett argues, 'Raby's primary fidelity is, in fact, to her own value system, one which questions, defies, and reeducates the world in which she lives,'³⁵⁶ and punishment of any kind is presented as incompatible with that value system. The best account of that system is given by Melissa Sites:

Mary Shelley has three related goals in *Falkner*: first, to present a reformed model of the personal and public social order in response to Godwin's best known novel, *Things as they Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*; second to present a reformed masculine Romantic hero, based on the education and improvement of the characters of Rupert Falkner (a Byronic hero) and Gerard Neville (a Shelleyan

³⁵² Betty Bennett, "Not this time Victor", 14.

³⁵³ Sites, 'Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 151.

³⁵⁴ Ellis, '*Falkner* and Other Fictions', 160.

³⁵⁵ Jowell, 'Mary Shelley's Mothers', 318.

³⁵⁶ Bennett, "Not this time Victor", 15.

hero); and third, to present a fully realized Wollstonecraftian heroine in the education and life of Elizabeth (Raby) Falkner, a “womanly” yet independent-minded and idealistic heroine.³⁵⁷

But Sites does not sufficiently accept Shelley’s recognition that the individual is not free wholly to mould the world to her wishes. Any success involves compromise. As Saunders points out, ‘[h]ers was a muted view of life’s possibilities – particularly of those open to women’.³⁵⁸ The novel is informed by the same principles that she sets out quite explicitly in her journal:

I beleive [sic] that we are sent here to educate ourselves & that self denial & disappointment & self controul are all part of our education- that it is not by taking away all restraining law that our improvement is to be achieved- & though many things need *great* amendment – I can by no means go so far as my *friends* would have me.³⁵⁹

In other words she retains the ‘passion for reforming the world’ that her husband confessed in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, and like him she accepts that the condition of reforming the world is a successful reform of the self, but she accepts as he did not the need for some ‘restraining law’.³⁶⁰ Her ambition is to reform Jupiter rather than to oust him. The kind of reform she has in mind is best exemplified in the way in which she at once submits to and revises the fictions on which she models her novel.

The most important of these is her father’s first novel, *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. The novel rehearses the principle that her father had set out in *Political Justice* that any reform of society could only be consequent on a reform of the self: *Falkner*, and its immediate predecessor *Lodore*, differ from Shelley’s earlier novels in that they suggest that such a social alternative is possible. The holocaust of families that

³⁵⁷ Sites, ‘Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 150/1.

³⁵⁸ Saunders, ‘Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley’s *Falkner*’, 212/3.

³⁵⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. II, 554.

³⁶⁰ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 232. (quoted from Thomas Love Peacock who in chapter 2 of *Nightmare Abbey* describes Scythorp – a Shelley character- as ‘troubled with the passion for reforming the world.’)

ends the majority of her 1820s fiction is replaced by the prospect of life carrying on in a reformed family circle.³⁶¹ In this they differ too from Godwin's own novel, *Caleb Williams*. As Melissa Sites and others have recognised, Shelley clearly chooses the name Falkner for her hero in order to prompt comparison with Falkland in Godwin's novel.³⁶² Throughout most of the novel Falkner suffers agonies of remorse for a 'crime', the actions of his that resulted in Alithea's death, that he is unwilling publicly to confess. His situation directly reflects Falkland's whose life is destroyed by the murder of Tyrell that he too cannot bring himself to confess. Falkner allows Alithea's reputation to be besmirched as a woman who has abandoned her child in favour of her lover, an injustice that repeats in more muted terms Falkland's injustice in allowing the Hawkinses to be executed for the crime that he has himself committed. Neville's ambition to vindicate his mother's reputation allies him with Caleb, who, by proving Falkland guilty of murder, would exonerate the men unjustly executed for that crime. But, as Sites points out, the contrast between the two novels is as strong as the resemblances:

But compare the culmination of *Falkner* to *Caleb Williams*: the actions of Caleb actually do bring about Falkland's destruction- his physical wasting away and his conviction for murder- whereas in *Falkner*, Elizabeth's actions bring the inherent goodness of Falkner's character forward and allow for the forgiveness of Falkner that Caleb feels Falkland also could have deserved, had the two of them openly dealt with their grievances with one another as Mary Shelley's characters do. Elizabeth does not destroy but allows Falkner at last to redeem himself, to transform from a destructive Byronic hero to a more enlightened Shelleyan one, to live instead of seeking an "honorable" suicide.³⁶³

Caleb Williams is famously one of the first novels not to incorporate a courtship plot. It was a daring experiment by Godwin, but it also had the effect of allowing him to write a novel in which women are only accommodated on the margins, a novel of the kind that Shelley rehearsed, though to quite different ends, in her own *Frankenstein*. In her novel,

³⁶¹ Saunders, 'Rehabilitating the Family in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 214.

³⁶² Sites, 'Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 167.

³⁶³ Sites, 'Utopian Domesticity as Social Reform in Mary Shelley's *Falkner*', 153.

Caleb at last succeeds in exposing Falkland's guilt (I speak of the published rather than the manuscript conclusion), only to find that his victory leaves him feeling guilt-ridden rather than triumphant. It is the conclusion that in *Falkner* Mary Shelley avoids, and it is avoided, she suggests, because in her novel, unlike her father's, women are allowed central roles.

The most iconic image in *Caleb Williams* is the iron chest that Caleb is rifling when apprehended by Falkland, the chest in which, as Caleb suspects, proof of his crime is concealed. George Colman's stage version of Godwin's novel was entitled *The Iron Chest*.

At the very end of the novel Caleb remarks:

The contents of the fatal trunk, from which all my misfortunes originated, I have never been able to ascertain. I once thought it contained some murderous instrument or relic connected with the fate of the unhappy Tyrrel. I am now persuaded that the secret it encloses, is a faithful narrative of that and its concomitant transactions, written by Mr. Falkland, and reserved in case of the worst, that, if by any unforeseen event his guilt should come to be fully disclosed, it might contribute to redeem the wreck of his reputation.³⁶⁴

In other words he imagines that Falkland like Falkner left a narrative offering his own account of his crime. One crucial difference between the two novels is that Falkland's account is absent from the novel. Its absence reveals that the novel, which consists for the most part of Caleb's first-person account of events, is recognized at the last to offer only a limited and partial access to truth. The reader is deprived of the comfort of a clear resolution. Mary Shelley is able to resolve her novel in part because she accommodates Falkner's account of the events that led to Alitheia's death, an account that the evidence brought before the court at Falkner's trial fully supports. Another crucial difference between the two novels is indicated by the different containers for the two narratives. Falkner does not lock his manuscript in an iron chest but in a 'little rosewood box' (*Falkner*, Vol. I, 196). It is an artfully feminised container, chosen, I suspect, to figure the crucial difference between the two novels.

³⁶⁴ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 315.

In *Falkner* Mary Shelley feminises her father's novel, and it is this that allows her to substitute for the tragic conclusion of *Caleb Williams* the happy ending to which her own novel drives. The point becomes clearer if another text to which Mary Shelley draws repeated attention is considered. Neville is encouraged, he tells Elizabeth, in his quest to vindicate his mother by his reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

‘I have read that play,’ said Neville, ‘till each word seems instinct with a message direct to my heart –as if my own emotions gave a conscious soul to every line. Hamlet was called upon to avenge a father – in execution of his task he did not spare a dearer, a far more sacred name – if he used no daggers with his mother, he spoke them; nor winced though she writhed beneath his hand. Mine is a lighter – yet a holier duty. I would vindicate a mother – without judging my father – without any accusation against him, I would establish her innocence.’ (*Falkner*, Vol.I, 270)

When he leaves her, Elizabeth reaches down the play from the shelves and reads it through. Neville and Hamlet both have a task imposed on them by the death of a parent, but Hamlet's ambition to avenge his father is impeded by the misogyny that reveals itself in his exchanges with his mother and with Ophelia. He embraces the male code of revenge that his father has imposed on him, but it is a code that seems to entail a savage rejection of femininity. Neville's task, unlike Hamlet's is self-imposed and a response to his belief that a mother rather than a father has been wronged.

Shakespearean tragedy, Mary Shelley seems to suggest, is an expression of a world that offers little space for the feminine. When Elizabeth follows her father to prison, she becomes Cordelia to his Lear, and again the parallel is marked. “‘Daughters, when they marry,” observed Falkner, “leave father, mother, all and follow the fortunes of their husbands”” (*Falkner*, Vol.III, 244). He echoes Cordelia's reply to her father's demand that

she tell her love for him:
Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act I, Scene 1.

In the event Elizabeth contrives to marry without leaving her father. She divides her love between husband and father, confident that, in the words of P. B. Shelley, ‘to divide is not to take away’ (*Epipsychidion*, l.161).³⁶⁶ It is the accommodation of feminine values in *Falkner* that allows Neville to escape the sterile masculine code that requires him to meet Falkner in a duel. It allows his relationship with Elizabeth’s father to grow and to change.

The novelist that Shelley most admired amongst her contemporaries was Bulwer Lytton (then simply Edward Bulwer). In a journal entry for January 11, 1831, she wrote: ‘I have been reading with much increased admiration Paul Clifford –It is a wonderful, a sublime book – What will Bulwer become? The First Author of the age? I do not doubt it – He is a magnificent writer.’³⁶⁷ One recommendation was no doubt that Bulwer was a great admirer of Godwin and of Godwin’s novels, especially *Caleb Williams*.³⁶⁸ Bulwer won some notoriety, especially amongst the writers for *Fraser’s Magazine* for choosing as the hero of his novel, *Paul Clifford*, a highwayman, and, still more remarkably, for the hero of *Eugene Aram* (1832) a murderer. For the *Edinburgh Review*, Aram is representative of Bulwer’s heroes because he constitutes a ‘moral anomaly’. A notorious eighteenth-century murderer is recreated ‘in the romantic garb of a *refined lover*, of an enthusiastic scholar, living quite as much in the ideal as the actual world’ and yet we are invited to accept that ‘this romantic enthusiast is, after all, a murderer, and for money!’³⁶⁹ In a satirical squib for *Fraser’s*, W. M. Thackeray makes a similar point more abrasively. Posing as one of Bulwer’s grateful disciples, he claims to have learned from *Eugene Aram* how ‘to mix vice and virtue up together in such an inextricable confusion as to render it impossible that any preference should be given to either, or that the one, indeed, should be at all distinguishable from the other’. In particular, he has learned from Bulwer a technique of

³⁶⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, 517.

³⁶⁷ *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, 557.

³⁶⁸ For an account of Godwin’s influence on Bulwer, see Lawrence Poston, ‘Bulwer’s Godwinian Myth’, in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*, ed. Allan Conrad Christensen (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 78-90.

³⁶⁹ See ‘Mr. Bulwer’s Novels’, Eugene Aram, *Edinburgh Review*, 55 (April, 1832), 208-19.

characterization that requires, if an adulterer is wanted, to look for him in ‘the class of country curates,’ and ‘being in search of a tender-hearted, generous, high-minded hero of romance’ to look for him ‘in the lists of men who have cut throats for money’.³⁷⁰ *Falkner* is clearly an attempt by Mary Shelley to offer a hero almost as unconventional. Falkner is a strange character, a man who suffers lifelong remorse because he holds himself guilty of the death of the woman that he loves, and yet a man who can ask at the very end of the novel, ‘henceforth I am to be stamped with ignominy – and yet in what am I worse than my fellows?’ (*Falkner*, Vol. III, 256). Bulwer had learned from Godwin’s highwayman, Captain Raymond, the folly of a society that does not allow people to change. In *Eugene Aram* he confronts the problem of how one should treat a murderer who has in the course of time wholly changed from the person who committed the crime. At the novel’s conclusion Falkner raises directly the same issue when he first recognises that he ‘must be shut out from society – a branded man’ and yet ‘intimately felt the injustice of this’ (*Falkner*, Vol. III, 285). Shelley is fully aware of her husband’s belief that to ‘loathe’ one’s own crime, the repentance that Christians demand of sinners, does not constitute a virtue but rather a ‘dark idolatry of self’ (*The Revolt of Islam*, VIII, XXII), but the conclusion that Shelley herself reaches in the novel’s penultimate chapter is oddly still more challenging:

The whole order of events is inscrutable – one little change, and none of us would be as we are now. Except as a lesson or a warning, we ought not to contemplate the past, but the future certainly demands our attention. (*Falkner*, Vol. III, 297)

The passage marks an arresting end to a career as a novelist in which Mary Shelley had seemed to write fiction precisely because it was an activity that gave her a licence to contemplate the past. Perhaps it offers a clue as to why *Falkner* was to be her last novel.

³⁷⁰ See ‘Elizabeth Brownrigge: A Tale’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, 6 (August, 1832), 67-88.

5. 3. Conclusion

In *Falkner*, Mary Shelley manages to rework her own past and to come to terms with the traumatic events that she had addressed in one way or another in all of the novels that she had written after her husband's death. She reunites herself with all those dear to her, Godwin, Byron, Shelley and she manages to write, albeit in disguised form, the 'Lives' of Godwin and Shelley that she believed it was her duty to write despite the fact that it was a duty that remained unfulfilled. Furthermore she vindicates the reputation of the mother, saving it from the posthumous fate to which her father had unwittingly condemned it. She also, in so far as she is able, resolves in this final novel the conflicting views of education, especially the education of women that had been expressed in the earlier novels: an education should aim at a person's independence, but, she allows, that independence might be arrived at by different, even contradictory, routes. *Falkner* was published in 1837. Mary Shelley had fourteen years still to live, but she wrote no more novels. No doubt there were many reasons for this, not least the easing of the economic pressures that had impelled her to attempt to earn a living from her pen. But it remains a possibility worth considering that her career as a novelist ended because she had finally succeeded in resolving the problems that all of her novels in their different ways explore.

6. Conclusion

All of Mary Shelley's novels can, like her very first novel, *Frankenstein*, be understood as coterie productions, novels inspired by the literary coteries that Mary Shelley was born into, and that she joined when she married Percy Bysshe Shelley, but they should also be recognised as productions in which she subjects the values of these coteries to a searching, a rigorous, and a deeply humane critique. Jane Blumberg is dismissive of the claims of the later novels:

[i]t is no surprise that the novels that followed [*The Last Man*] are so different from the first three and by comparison so uninteresting. *Perkin Warbeck*, *Lodore*, and *Falkner* represent standard genres, the historical novel and the novel of fashionable life, and suggest that Shelley had perhaps solved some of her earlier philosophical questions and could now write for pleasure and profit.³⁷¹

In her *Mary Shelley's Early Novels*, Blumberg tries to establish Shelley as a writer who might properly claim creative autonomy. It is true that she lived and wrote surrounded and influenced by other writers, yet at the same time, as Blumberg recognises, she developed and maintained a strong, independent mind. Given the strength of the case that Blumberg makes it is depressing that she should dismiss the later novels as 'uninteresting'. Blumberg has probably done more than any other critic to establish that '[w]hat actually drove Shelley's fiction seems to have been a fundamental intellectual conflict with the men in her life, men that she loved deeply,³⁷² an intellectual conflict that also marked her retrospective engagement with her mother in which she interrogated the manner in which her mother had chosen to live her life and also interrogated the writings on which Shelley had to rely for the most direct form of contact with her mother that was available to her. In the later novels, as I have tried to show in this thesis, she continues her engagement with the ideas and with the creative practices of her parents' generation, and of her own generation, particularly as it was represented by her husband P. B. Shelley, and their friend

³⁷¹ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels*, 117.

³⁷² Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels*, 6.

Byron. It is an engagement that culminated, I argue, only in the very last of her novels, *Falkner*. This thesis has disputed Blumberg's characterisation of Shelley as a writer whose 'radical youth' gave way to a 'disappointing middle-aged conservatism'.³⁷³ It may be true that 'Shelley was never a passionate radical like her husband' but the values that she articulates in the novels of her widowhood are neither abruptly assumed nor do they constitute a betrayal of the values that she had espoused in her youth. Even in challenging the ideas associated with her parents and her husband she remained a radical in her own way, radical of course in the proper sense of the word, that is, her ambition was to change society from the roots. Shelley should be understood as arriving, through a process of negotiation with the ideas of her husband and her own Italian circle, at a position that is distinctively her own. Even her very first novel '*Frankenstein* is in many respects a subtle parody of Godwinian rebellion, rationality and perfectibility'.³⁷⁴ Her later novels continue to engage actively with the views that her parents and her husband held in common, in particular a faith in human perfectibility that she at once admired and viewed with a dry scepticism. It is no doubt a process that allowed her to come to terms with her traumatic personal experience, but, I wish to claim, it has a wider cultural significance. In Mary Shelley's later novels one can trace the process by which the inheritors of Romanticism, the Victorians as they are commonly known, arrived at a new cultural formation through a complex process in which they at once accepted and rejected their inheritance. It is for this reason that I wish to claim not only that Mary Shelley's later novels have a value in and for themselves that has not been adequately recognised, but that they are also crucial documents for all those wishing to understand the relationship between the Romantic age and the age which succeeded it.

³⁷³ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels*, 32.

³⁷⁴ Blumberg, *Mary Shelley's Early Novels*, 32.

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