



The Last Man (Oxford World's Classics)

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Morton D. Paley

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'The last man! I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me.' Mary Shelley, Journal (May 1824).

Best remembered as the author of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley wrote *The Last Man* eight years later, on returning to England from Italy after her husband's death.

It is the twenty-first century, and England is a republic governed by a ruling elite, one of whom, Adrian, Earl of Windsor, has introduced a Cumbrian boy to the circle. This outsider, Lionel Verney, narrates the story, a tale of complicated, tragic love, and of the gradual extermination of the human race by plague.

The Last Man also functions as an intriguing roman à clef, for the saintly Adrian is a monument to Percy Bysshe Shelley, and his friend Lord Raymond is a portrait of Byron. The novel offers a vision of the future that expresses a reaction against Romanticism, as Shelley demonstrates the failure of the imagination and of art to redeem her doomed characters.

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