

# The Crisis Literature of The Last Man – His Individuality, Memory and Space:

Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* and George Orwell's  
*Nineteen Eighty-Four*\*

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**T**HE THEME of “the last man” has captivated the imagination of numerous authors. It is often regarded as a quintessentially romantic theme.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, if we are to look retrospectively, we can trace the origin of the theme to 19<sup>th</sup> century works such as Jean Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's *Le Dernier Homme* (1805), George Gordon Lord Byron's poem *Darkness* (1816), Thomas Lovell Beddoes' unfinished play *The Last Man* (1823–1825), Thomas Campbell's poem *The Last Man* (1823) and Thomas Hood's *The Last Man* (1824). If we add to this Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man* (1826) we notice that in the span of only twenty-one years literature had been blessed with no less than six “last men.” But should we find satisfactory the idea that this theme died out along with British Romanticism or can we trace inheritors in the literature belonging to writers of the next century who may have consciously or even more plausibly unconsciously adapted it to new contexts in their response to historical periods of crises?

## 1. Two Novels Reacting to Historical Crises and Epistemological Uncertainty

**M**ARY SHELLEY is widely and rightly regarded today as the pioneer of science fiction through works like *The Last Man* or *Frankenstein*. The works of those before her as well as Shelley's post apocalyptic fictional space is in part a response to the horrors of the French Revolution, the carnage of the Napoleonic Wars and disenchantment with various literary and political ideologies.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, after going relatively unnoticed in the 1830s, the novel has not been republished until the

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twentieth century, after WWII, when it suddenly underwent an unexpected revival, a rise in importance and readership. It thus gained its newfound popularity alongside other hopelessly dark science-fiction apocalyptic universes such as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (a book whose initial title was, as we might do well to remember, *The Last Man in Europe* before the publisher Frederic Warburg suggested to Orwell to use the now famous title). I believe that one of the reasons for the sudden resurfacing of Mary Shelley's novel alongside twentieth century post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction is neither coincidental nor haphazard but rather indicative of a similar sense of anxiety and epistemological uncertainty that dominated the Napoleonic era as well as most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If this is the case, the two novels may have more in common than it may be obvious at first sight and a comparative analysis may be useful in determining the possible points of convergence.

## 2. Nature vs. the Artificiality of Ideology

**B**OTH NOVELS present visions of humanity disconnected from nature. With regards to Shelley's novel, while other "last man" narratives portray the decay of human kind as analogous with the decay of nature itself, in the case of Shelley's novel the sickness of humanity as a result of the plague is contrasted with the health of nature.<sup>3</sup> The "sickness" of the human kind can thus be traced to its disconnection from nature. The plague has been given a diversity of explanations. It has been equated with the French Revolution (the novel is set in 2092, exactly 300 years that is after the revolutionary terror), enlightenment rationalism or mankind's will to power. We are dealing with attempts by humanity to control nature, subdue and forge a new environment. The plague emerges as the result of this unnatural attempt. An important fact noticed by many critics is that characters in the novel have literary and political ideological analogues. Thus Raymond stands for imperialism, Ryland for egalitarian ethos, Adrian for intellectual power and visionary idealism. Regardless of their individual plights and of the roles that they fulfil, all the characters fail in the end: Raymond dies in his attempt to conquer and "civilise" Constantinople while leading the Greek army. Overwhelmed, Ryland gives up his chair as Lord Protector of England. Adrian, a representation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's political vision, as well as his intellectual ambition that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind," drowns.

Despite the fact that Mary considered Adrian's humanitarian impulse worthwhile, unmasking the reminiscence of her own republican background, the conclusion of the novel signals with irony that Adrian's call for utopia<sup>4</sup> upon becoming Lord Protector is insufficient for saving mankind. As Lokke states: Monarchists, republicans, democrats, imperialists, theocrats, idealists and utopian visionaries all prove ineffectual in the face of universal pestilence.<sup>5</sup> The novel thus criticises man's ideological attempts at salvation while deconstructing the humanistic belief that man is central to creation and therefore eternal in his existence.<sup>6</sup>

Lionel Verney, on the other hand, survives the plague and becomes immune to it. In the beginning of the novel, Lionel is a representative of the Wordsworthian antisocial child of nature for whom nature fulfils the role of *the nurse/The guide, the guardian*

of [man's] heart, and soul/Of all [his] moral being.<sup>7</sup> He reverts to this state several times within the novel. It may be that his sickness and subsequent miraculous immunity to the plague is linked to this origin and the shifts in his identity, ultimately linking the plague to man's displacement from nature.

Orwell also criticizes a failed human attempt at salvation through ideology, his dystopian state fulfilling the role that the plague has in Shelley's novel. The novelist portrays the totalitarian arrogance of attempting to create "the new man" by ideological means. The artificiality of this construct is what separates man from nature, a separation that, far from creating utopia, has dire consequences for the wellbeing of the world's inhabitants. On top of this, we have in the nightmarish dystopian city, an image of the disastrous effect of mankind's effort to rationalize, regulate and control his environment. The indication that Orwell was sensitive to the issue of the "natural vs. artificially constructed space" comes to us from images of Winston and Julia in the forest outside London. The two manage to find a *topos* that almost fulfills the role of a natural micro-utopia within dystopia, a place where influence of state power temporally collapses, freedom and sexuality are no longer regulated and the two can catch a glimpse of a human nature outside the ideological limitation of the Party approved one. This natural space is antithetical to the space of the city where it is the Party that decides what human nature is.

Orwell's apocalyptic space is not a *topos* from which humans become extinct as a species, like in Mary Shelley's novel, but rather one from which an individual human nature that is not state-bound becomes extinct and replaced with the ideologically constructed, Party approved human nature. For this reason Smith is himself a version of "the last man," comparable to Mary Shelley's Lionel Verney.

### 3. Outsiders of History and Prophetic Messages from the Future

ONE MAY argue that Winston Smith is not, technically speaking, "the last man" even though Orwell initially considered incorporating the phrase into his title. Nevertheless, Winston is conceived as the last man in a symbolic manner. The character of O'Brien, Winston's torturer, gives the first clue in a dialogue from which we can draw a parallel between him and Lionel. He positions Winston's individuality outside history, outside the present of Oceania.

*Winston Smith: I know you'll fail. Something in this world... some spirit you will never overcome...*

*O'Brien: What is it, this principle?*

*Winston Smith: I don't know. The spirit of man!*

*O'Brien: And do you consider yourself a man?*

*Winston Smith: Yes.*

*O'Brien: If you're a man, Winston, you're the last man. Your kind is extinct. We are the inheritors. Do you realize that you are alone? You are outside history. You unexist. Get up.<sup>8</sup>*

He is isolated as a freak case, an individual surviving an extinct species, somehow left outside the control of the Party. The images of Shelley's plague and of Orwell's totalitarian state fulfil a similar role in the novels. The compatibility of these images is proven by writers such as Albert Camus, who masterfully combined these two images in the 20<sup>th</sup> century work *La Peste*. They represent historically bound expressions of the dire state of affairs, the present tense of the novels reflecting the anxieties of the age. In spite of this, the two characters, Winston and Lionel, manage to transcend history. Lionel Verney is the only known man to have caught the plague and got cured from it while Winston Smith represents a singularity that perceives the universal manipulation of the Party. As well as this, the two characters are "outside history" because of the special status they enjoy as chroniclers and observers of their dying species. Winston Smith keeps a diary, while Lionel Verney writes an entire book narrating the end of man. Interestingly enough, in both cases, the target of these futuristic narratives is not posterity but the past. In Orwell's novel, the past constantly resurfaces as more important than the present or the future.

*For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder was he writing this diary? . . . For the first time the magnitude of what he had undertaken came home to him. How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the present, in which case it would not listen to him; or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless.*

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*He filled the glasses and raised his own glass by the stem.*

*O'Brien: What shall it be this time? . . . To the confusion of the Thought Police? To the death of Big Brother? To humanity? To the future?*

*Winston Smith: To the past, said Winston.*

*O'Brien: The past is more important, agreed O'Brien gravely.<sup>9</sup>*

In Mary Shelley's case on the other hand, the narrative is aimed at a past time by nature of the peculiar form of the "found manuscript" literary device the author adopts. In her narrative, a 19<sup>th</sup> century editor finds a Cumaean Sybil's cave and uncovers the Sybilline leaves containing Verney's apocalyptic narrative of the end of man. Thus, ironically, Verney's main audience is not the future of his 21<sup>st</sup> century, since, after all, he is the last man, but the past of the 19<sup>th</sup>, his tale becoming a prophetic warning from the future. Needless to add, the same idea of "a prophecy from the future" can be relegated to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (as well as other 20<sup>th</sup> century dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives). In Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Man*, to give just one other example, Stapledon's last man sends his narrative by means of a telepathic warning to the first man prophesying his successive rise and fall over billions of years. All these literary devices: diaries without future addressees, chronicles dedicated "to the dead," and telepathic messages to the past underlie the authors' anxiety and scepticism about the present and future of mankind in times of crises.

## 4. The Memory and Space of the Last Man

CENTRAL TO both novels is the connection between memory and space. In the face of a potential obliteration of “the human,” either by the metaphorical plague as will to power,<sup>10</sup> failure of ideology or by the re-education experiments of totalitarian systems in the aim of creating “the new man,” memory becomes important because through it, a link with a pre-dystopian/pre-apocalyptic past can be maintained.

Both novels discussed here are narratives of modern memory. The French historian Pierre Nora has commented on the importance of the concept of *lieux de mémoire* for modernity. This concept of memory<sup>11</sup> is another thing that brings together the apocalyptic universes of Shelley and Orwell in their literary reaction to the periods of crisis in human history.

Space becomes important in the issue of memory preservation because space, and more specifically buildings and architecture, have the potential to outlive the individual and maintain his/her cultural heritage even in the face of annihilation. Robert Bevan makes this clear in his book *The Destruction of Memory* where he insists on the cultural importance of what he calls “totemic architecture”<sup>12</sup> as caches of historical memory. He illustrates this with historical events and buildings targeted precisely because of their memorial role: the French Revolution, the Nazi *Kristallnacht*, Stalin’s destruction of churches, Guernica, Dresden, Cambodia, Bosnia, the destruction of Sarajevo’s National Library, and in recent day, al-Qaeda’s destruction of the World Trade Center, seem to confirm Bevan’s thesis that there is not only a war against people but a cultural war against architecture and its symbolic role.<sup>13</sup>

Mary Shelley lived in the aftermath of the French Revolution, an event during which, to give just two examples, the mansions of Place Bellecour were condemned to death because “they were an insult to Republican morals”<sup>14</sup> and bell towers were threatened with demolition because “their height above other buildings seems to contradict the principles of equality.”<sup>15</sup> As the philosopher Henri Lefebvre argues: “monumental space offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage . . . it constituted a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one.”<sup>16</sup> The failure or destruction of such spaces has the effect of dissolving cultural identity. Bevan also clearly points out that a building’s monumental stature is not dependant necessarily on the size but on the fact that, by virtue of their history and the identification their users have with them, they have had meaning thrust upon them.<sup>17</sup>

Mary Shelley’s novel is the result of an attempt at criticising several particular brands of ideological narratives, a quality it shares with George Orwell’s works. However, neither of these works is indicative of the thought of conventional political thinkers that would simply choose one side of the political spectrum and write against the opposition. Although Mary Shelley was at no point in time a political conservative, after the death of her husband, Percy Shelley, she grew increasingly sceptical of the reason and republican ideals of the Enlightenment. In *The Last Man*, she systematically attacks all the popular political narratives of her age, be that of imperial Britain, colonialism or republicanism. She also portrays the image of a totalitarian theocratic state rising after the crumbling of the old order.

In the face of ideological disillusionment, Shelley restates the importance of memory. Samantha Webb connects Lionel Verney's dedication of his narrative "to the dead" with the essay written by Mary Shelley's father, the anarchist philosopher William Godwin, a work entitled *Essays on Sepulchres* in which he proposed the creation of memorials "to the illustrious dead from all times."<sup>18</sup> Godwin believed that such memorials could advance the common good by engendering a reverence for the past. Webb thus notes that in spite of his republican principles, the philosopher believes no progress can be achieved without memory, without establishing a clear line of continuity with the past and that memory is most usefully accessed through the immediacy of the public memorial.<sup>19</sup> Godwin's theory on the importance of the public memorial as an immediate memory trigger anticipates Pierre Nora's thesis of the importance of *lieux de mémoire* for modernity discussed earlier. In Godwin's opinion, one of the fundamental errors of the French Revolution was the attempt to cut all ties with the historical era before the revolution.

In Mary Shelley's novel, I find the most important *lieu de mémoire* to be Windsor Castle (along with the town and forest around). Its failure as totemic space brings about the failure of memory, the fall of the last bastion of hope, sending the English and all those who found refuge in England from the plague in a full blown exodus on the continent. As a disclaimer, one would have to note that the distinct symbolic role of this piece of architecture should not be mistakenly interpreted as Shelley's full endorsement of monarchic rule. Monarchism and aristocracy are severely criticized in the novel through the character of the countess, former queen of England. Windsor thus becomes not a privileged space in the novel through its association with a particular ideology but through its association with memory and the character of Adrian. Adrian is the Earl of Windsor, the countess' son and by right heir to the throne but on the other hand he holds republican views (much to the disappointment of his mother, the Countess).

By virtue of Adrian's liminal political identity, Windsor becomes the seat of both continuity and progress. A symbol of reform placed between the two extremes of conservative monarchy, on the one hand, and social revolution on the other. Though proving insufficient in the end, Adrian's attempts to counter the plague, are the only efforts portrayed by Mary Shelley as truly heroic and worthwhile, at least as prolonging man's existence if not saving it.<sup>20</sup> In the overall economy of the novel, England is the last country to be hit by the plague, survivors from all over Europe and the world finding refuge on the island. Windsor thus becomes not only an important symbolic topography for England but for the hopes of all surviving mankind. In the end, the plague nevertheless hits the country, London as well as other important cities succumbing to its effect. Windsor Castle remains for a while the last refuge on earth where the plague has not struck.

*There then, in that castle—in Windsor Castle, birthplace of Idris and my babes, should be the heaven and retreat for the wrecked bark of human society. Its forest should be our world—its garden afford us food; within its walls, I should establish the shaken throne of health.*<sup>21</sup>

When at last it fails in its role as a protective space (plague victims begin to appear around Windsor,) this last safe haven collapses and it is decided that all remaining survivors on

English soil should gather and leave on an exodus in search of a natural space that would be nurturing and fulfil the now lost protective role.<sup>22</sup> Another thing that further emphasizes Windsor's connection with memory (after the exodus outside England) is Lionel Verney's choice to bury Idris in the Winsor family vault in St. George's Chapel. As indicated above, Mary Shelley dedicated her novel "to the dead," alluding to William Godwin's *Essays on Sepulchres* who argued the importance of burial memorials in creating historical continuity. Idris, daughter of the former queen of England and wife of "the last man" is the last human being to be buried in England. The last role Windsor Castle fulfills is that of a tomb encapsulating, along with Idris, memory itself.<sup>23</sup>

Idris' tomb serves also as an important meeting place between the Countess and Verney. Upon seeing her daughter dead, she repents of her former behavior and lust for power and makes peace with Verney. The former queen notices upon her road to the chapel through the empty cottages, the forest and the castle that "England remained though England was dead—it was the ghost of merry England that I beheld"<sup>24</sup> further emphasizing that, though the people disappeared, houses, cottages and of course the castle itself were the sole testifiers to their existence, memorials of history. And indeed, the same can be said for all of Europe as we see Verney wondering through Rome after all his companions died. Rome had become a ghost town, its great historical buildings, along with Verney's novel, the only signature testifying to the existence of man and his civilization.

We have seen how the French Revolution threatened cultural memory itself by its insistence on reconstructing space in accordance with political ideology. Although harboring republican principles, writers and philosophers such as Mary Shelley or William Godwin did not endorse such attempts and commented on the importance of the intersection of memory and space for progress. Similar attempts at ideological restructuring are clearly distinguishable in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most important writers that reacted to the attacks on memory in the age is George Orwell. His ideological positioning is again a complex matter, both sides of the political spectrum claiming Orwell as one of their own. The truth, however, seems to stem from John Rossi's pertinent essay from *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell* dealing with Orwell's work, *My Country, Right or Left*, in which Rossi dubs Orwell "A Revolutionary in Love with the Past."<sup>25</sup> Thus, we are dealing again with a liminal political identity, similar to those discussed earlier with regard to Shelley's novel. A revolutionary, fighting alongside the anarchists against the fascists in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War but at the same time defending the value of patriotism, the past and cultural memory, Orwell found the two dimensions compatible proclaiming himself a "Tory Anarchist."<sup>26</sup> The role of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in Rossi's light is not to attack socialism as a whole *per se*; as Orwell was and remained a democratic type of socialist,<sup>27</sup> and therefore did not intend it as such, but rather attempted to denounce totalitarian Stalinism, the Marxian view of history and deconstruct what he believed to be a very dangerous myth of his age, that socialism had been achieved in Russia and that this political model was worth following.<sup>28</sup>

Orwell believed that progress could be achieved only if a system could manage to draw the best from the past while leaving the worst behind and in this sense envisioned a union between some ideals of the right and those of the left.<sup>29</sup> In this particular sense, the author would have agreed with William Godwin's idea that influenced Mary

Shelley's novel: namely that a line of continuity with the past is in the best interest of progress. The existence of communism, fascism and Nazism threatened, as the French Revolution did in Shelley's time, to rewrite cultural memory on an ideological basis and break this line of continuity.

Pierre Nora's argument that modern memory is archival, relying on the materiality of the trace seems to be confirmed by several spaces and a text in Orwell's novel that functions as such traces of memory. The Party skillfully succeeded in rewriting the historical origins of important architecture around London ascribing them either to the period after the "revolution" or to the Middle Ages. What the Party disregarded was oral culture, parts of it surviving in the district of the proles, its connection with memory and space becoming relevant in the novel. Gladys Taylor, in her extremely interesting 206 page analysis of the historical meanings behind the lines of *Oranges and Lemons*, comments on the piece as being one of England's oldest nursery rhymes, having its origins lost in the mists of time. However, it is not the age of the popular rhyme itself that's impressive but the historical memory landscape constructed by the buildings to which it refers to. The rhyme contains (in its long version—Orwell worked out the short one) references to no less than 15 historical sites, old churches in London, most of which are built upon the ruins of much older sites of worship, the usage of some of the sites going as far back as Roman Britain (St. Martin-in-the-Fields). The intonation of each line of the song is said to represent the unique sound ringing of each church bell mentioned. Of the churches identified as belonging to the rhyme, Orwell refers to St. Clements (first church built on this site was in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century by the Danes) St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Shoreditch Church (built upon a church from the Saxon period), and the 'bell of Old Bailey' refers to the church of St. Sepulchre (built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this is a church that narrowly avoided complete destruction in the Second World War, when its nearby 18<sup>th</sup>-century watch-house was obliterated).

Though claiming certain social revolutionary principles, Orwell was adamantly against the Marxian idea that the working class had no country or national identity, believing that patriotism trumped class identity.<sup>30</sup> I believe that for Orwell the nursery rhyme surviving in the prole district is a way of representing his point. While the Inner and Outer Party intelligentsia were busy rewriting everything in Newspeak, the proles at some level managed to maintain an identity connected, even if only unconsciously and fragmented, to a pre-dystopian memory landscape. Throughout the novel, Winston Smith strives to gather line by line of the rhyme and thus metaphorically "ring the bells of London town,"<sup>31</sup> that is, reconstruct the fragmented collective topographic memory and identity that, in his opinion, would allow the proles to rebel against the Party. Not at all surprising then is also the fact that one of the hiding spots frequented by him and Julia in which they can manifest outside the Party's influence is a devastated old church tower. Two of the last four lines of the rhyme, originally signaling an execution, are given to Winston by O'Brien himself: "Here comes a candle to light you to bed/Here comes a chopper to chop off your head" while the last two lines of the original rhyme "Chop Chop Chop/The last man's dead" are left unuttered but implied by Winston's fate.

Another very interesting *lieu de mémoire*, connecting the habitat of the proles with memory landscapes, is represented by the room from the prole district in which no



telescreen had been installed and in which Winston and Julia manage to find a refuge and share the intimacy so severely restricted by the Party. The room awakens in Smith “a kind of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory.”<sup>32</sup> This safe haven permits Smith to read books and for Julia it becomes a space where she can manifest her forcefully repressed gender identity.<sup>33</sup>

In the above we have seen how in their treatment of space, Mary Shelley’s novel *The Last Man* and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have in common, the anxiety towards the present, the future of their age representing their mistrust in the promise of salvation that the ideologies of their age seemed to offer. Both manage to represent the importance of the intersection between memory and space in maintaining a line of continuity between past and present and the dangers that stem from attempts to sever this line. Their main characters are “last men” positioned outside history and are given the possibility to be observers, chroniclers of the apocalypse, an apocalypse that threatens the destruction of memory. Their individual warning messages are aimed invariably at the past of their narratives, since “the last man,” either as sole survivor of the plague or the lone critic of a dystopian state, obviously does not have posterity to look forward to.



## Notes

1. A.J. Sambrook, “A Romantic Theme: The Last Man,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* (Oxford) 2, 1966: 25-33.
2. Kari E. Lokke, “*The Last Man*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 128.
3. *Ibid.*, 116.
4. During the course of the novel Adrian hopes that: “[E]arth will become a Paradise. The energies of man 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. The favored countries of the south will throw off the iron yoke of servitude; poverty will quit us, and with that, sickness. What may not the forces, never before united, of liberty and peace achieve in this dwelling of man?” in Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Carey Lea and Blanchard, 1833), 192.
5. Lokke, “*The Last Man*,” 128.
6. Mary Shelley points towards man’s hubris in fragments such as: “We call ourselves lords of creation, wielders of the elements, masters of life and death, and we allege in excuse of this arrogance that, though the individual is destroyed, man continues forever” in Shelley, *The Last Man*, vol. 1, 202.
7. William Wordsworth, “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” in *Lyrical Ballads with a Few other Poems* (London: Printed for J&A Arch Gracechurch Street, 1798), 208.
8. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 579.
9. *Ibid.*, 31.
10. Lokke, “*The Last Man*,” 118-125.
11. Nora argues that “Modern memory is, above all, archival . . . It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image. . . . Memory is simply what was called ‘history’ in the past; the two have merged” in “From *Lieux de mémoire*

- to *Realms of Memory*,” the preface to *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, eds. Pierre Norra and Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 10.
12. Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 35.
  13. *Ibid.*, 8
  14. Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 33, caption 6.
  15. Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), 80.
  16. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 50.
  17. Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory*, 16.
  18. Cf. William Godwin, “Essay on Sepulchres,” in *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, vol. 6, ed. Mark Philip (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 6.
  19. Samantha Webb, “Reading the End of the World: *The Last Man*, History, and the Agency of Romantic Authorship,” in *Mary Shelley and Her Times*, eds. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 129.
  20. Lokke, “*The Last Man*,” 130.
  21. Shelley, *The Last Man*, 200.
  22. The fall of the totemic space of Windsor triggers the exodus of the people: “This northern country, I said, is no place for our diminished race. . . . We must seek some natural paradise, some garden of the earth, where our simple wants may be easily supplied and the enjoyment of the delicious climate compensate for the pleasures we have lost.” in *id.*, *The Last Man*, vol. 2, 220.
  23. “I looked with reverence on a structure, ancient almost as the rock on which it stood abode of kings, theme of admiration for the wise. With greater reverence and, tearful affection I beheld it as the asylum of the long lease of love I had enjoyed there with the perishable, unmatchable treasure of dust, which lay cold beside me. . . . I bore Idris up the isle into the chancel, and laid her softly down. The banners of the knights of the garter, and their half drawn swords, were hung in vain emblazonry above the stalls. The banner of her family hung there, still surmounted by its regal crown. Farewell to the glory and heraldry of England!” in *ibid.*, 235.
  24. *Ibid.*, 236.
  25. John Rossi, “My Country, Right or Left,” in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. John Rodden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87-99.
  26. Cf. Ian Williams, “Orwell and the British Left,” in *ibid.*, 101.
  27. *Ibid.*, 111.
  28. Robert Conquest, “Orwell, Socialism and the Cold War,” in *ibid.*, 131.
  29. Rossi, “My Country, Right or Left,” 87-99.
  30. John Rossi and John Rodden, “A Political Writer,” in *ibid.*, 7.
  31. The original nursery rhyme starts: “Gay go up and gay go down / To ring the bells of London town”. Interestingly, Winston mentions that bells do not ring anymore in London, his gathering of the rhyme equating to a metaphorical ringing of the bells, a wake up call.
  32. As example of totemic space in Orwell, one has to take into consideration the following fragment: “The room had awakened in him a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory. It seemed to him that he knew exactly what it felt like to sit in a room like this, in an arm-chair beside an open fire with your feet in the fender and a kettle on the hob; utterly alone, utterly secure, with nobody watching you, no voice pursuing you, no sound except the singing of the kettle and the friendly ticking of the clock.” in Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 100.
  33. “In this room I’m going to be a woman, not a Party Comrade” in *ibid.*, 313.

**Abstract****The Crisis Literature of The Last Man – His Individuality, Memory and Space:  
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The essay is a comparative analysis of Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The post apocalyptic theme of 'the last man' was considered a 19<sup>th</sup> century literary symptomatic response to a period of historical crisis. The question the essay poses is to what an extent did an author like George Orwell respond similarly to the anxieties of his own age in constructing the space of his dystopia? The essay traces the common ground between the two novels in the intersection between memory and architecture as creating instances of 'totemic space' (Robert Bevan) or, as Pierre Nora called them, *lieux de mémoire*. The historical positioning of the main characters as instances of 'the last man' is also discussed along with their relationship with nature as opposed to the ideological constructs towards which both authors reacted in their time.

**Keywords**

Shelley, Romanticism, Orwell, Memory Studies, Architecture, Nora, Bevan.