Dissecting the Body Politic: Nationhood and Otherness in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*

by

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ABSTRACT

The idea of the nation as body is certainly not new, nor is the representation of the body politic in literature an obscure critical direction; this thesis, however, aims at investigating the corporeal aspect of the body politic as metaphor, and how this serves Mary Shelley's socio-political ideas and proposals, especially during a period of time marked by groundbreaking changes in how the relationship among nation, society, and individual was perceived. Following this line of thought, the first part of my MA thesis will examine Mary Shelley's representations of the body politic as a corporeal symbol and a political metaphor in post-revolutionary, imperial England. By combining theories of the Gothic/gendered body with theories of nationalism and nationhood, as well as a broad range of related socio-political studies, I aim to enquire into how *Frankenstein* (1818) emerges as a narrative that negotiates questions of healthy and monstrous bodies politic, and how these bodies interact. To be more specific, I will explore Shelley's political programme in *Frankenstein* concerning the body politic as gendered in conjunction with issues of normality/abnormality, selfhood/otherness. In this respect, I will focus on Shelley's ideas for a political subjectivity that foregrounds the prominence of women in fostering the familial and the communal. The second part of my thesis will handle a similar preoccupation with the preservation of the familial/national but in Shelley's post-apocalyptic *The Last Man* (1826), a novel that narrates the story of England's body from birth to death and beyond. In this chapter, I will look into the entire process of the English national body's deconstruction, the function of the national self/other dichotomy, as well as the possibility of talking about a different kind of gendered nationhood in a world that is constantly moving, changing, and destroying, through a culture of loss and mourning.
INTRODUCTION: The Body as a Metaphor for Nation in Romantic Culture

"Let us go! England is in her shroud,-we may not enchain ourselves to a corpse. Let us go-the world is our country now.... The world is vast, and England, though her many fields and wide spread woods seem interminable, is but a small part of her" (The Last Man 326).

Corpses loom large in Mary Shelley's The Last Man (1826), a novel where the idea of death has strong political implications. Along these lines, the nation as corpse raises powerful questions not only as to why Mary Shelley introduces the body as a trope to talk about the political events of her time, but also as to the transformation of the national body after death. In this case, Lionel Verney's contention in Mary Shelley's novel that England is "a corpse" introduces the concept of the nation as a body whose health is inextricably connected to "our country" (326), a self-contained living organism that ends up being "in her shroud" (326) after the Plague infects it and brings out its inherent vulnerability. Placed in Mary Shelley's post-revolutionary setting, the nation as a dead body reflects the way ideas of nationhood during the nineteenth century come to be contested at the same time that they are affirmed/constructed as an imaginary space whose need for self-assertion gradually increases from the 1790s onwards.

In this thesis, I will look into the way the body of England is portrayed in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus (1818) and in The Last Man (1826). Narratives of nationhood are certainly developed in both texts, but it is interesting to examine first how Frankenstein takes up the theme of the nation as body in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and dissects the idea of healthy nationhood by bringing it face to face with its monstrous body-double. I consider this a necessary step for examining the way the idea of nationhood resurfaces in a later text, The Last Man, that addresses the question of whether the dead English nation can be re-animated, especially in an imperial world.
reconsidered after the coming of the Plague, and the mobility that ensues. These two novels bring to the forefront a most indicative feature of Shelley's political agenda: employing the body as a key metaphor in arguments about the nation and its state during and after the revolutionary years. In exploring the body as metaphor, however, I would suggest that one does not stick to the level of word, but should go beyond what Paul Ricoeur calls the "nominal definition" (75) that merely points to what is being identified with what. Instead, it is the "generative causes" (75) that allow us to look into the discourse itself surrounding the metaphor.

In fact, what I have observed in the course of my research is not so much a scarcity of studies on the concept of the body politic as represented in revolutionary and post-revolutionary discourses around Europe, but a profound eclipse of research on the body—metaphor itself as appropriate in utilizing political representations. Despite the abundant presence of the body politic as political representation, the reason why the body itself, the nation, and the Revolution became so intimately connected during the Romantic period is one that has been underexamined. This is why I use Antoine de Baecque's most instructive book *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800* (1997) as an invaluable guide that provides a detailed account of the function of the corporeal metaphor during the Revolution in France. In particular, de Baecque begins his exploration by describing the setting of a 1789 political cartoon launched in Paris with the title "The Patriotic Fat Remover," which constitutes one of the many examples in which, as de Baecque argues, "the flesh of the body and its political significance" (2) come together to make a statement:

In this engraving, an obese prelate is pressed into a 'physiological machine' activated by a revolutionary soldier: pieces of gold fall into the 'national treasury' as the ecclesiastic loses weight. In the background are two spindly,
emanciated priests, 'their fat removed' in keeping with the title of the picture.

(1)

Cited as an example of applying the corporeal metaphor in discussions about the political regime of the time, the particular illustration tellingly attests to the centrality of the body as a host of political representations. Although de Baecque concentrates his analysis on the utility of the corpus as a metaphor in French political discourses, I am going to shift focus to the presence of the body as a political representational tool pertaining to questions of nationhood during and after the revolutionary controversies in Britain. The transitional period from the sovereign body1 to the body of the people (de Baecque 8) surely witnessed a profusion of political commentary whose central political trope was the body,2 the traces of which can also be discerned throughout a variety of English texts/commentaries on the French Revolution. Indeed, the attentive portrayal of the healthy versus the unhealthy/monstrous/dead body politic gathers force in political representations like the ones Edmund Burke sketches in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), a conservative

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1 Even before the equation of the body of the king with the body of the nation in general, the years going before the early modern period also subscribed intensely to a discourse of embodiment whose member parts corresponded to certain positions of power from the prince to the soldiers and below; John of Salisbury, for instance, writes in the twelfth century: "The position of the head in the republic is occupied . . . by a prince . . . the place of the heart is occupied by the senate, from which proceeds the beginning of good and bad works. The duties of the ears, eyes and mouth are claimed by the judges and the governors of provinces. The hands coincide with officials and soldiers . . ." (qtd. in Jonathan Harris 1). Later on, the body politic during the Elizabethan times remained revolving around the figure of the sovereign (the Queen in this case), but, because of Elizabeth herself, it was reworked, according to Sussane Scholz, so that the "head had absorbed the body" (5) to legitimate the gender of the sovereign.

2 See also Thomas Hobbes's use of the body as metaphor for political representations in his *Leviathan* (1651): For what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the Artificer? Art goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of Nature, man. For by art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth, or State (in Latin, Civitas), which is but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body; the magistrates and other officers of judicature and execution, artificial joints; reward and punishment (by which fastened to the seat of the sovereignty, every joint and member is moved to perform his duty) are the nerves, that do the same in the body natural; the wealth and riches of all the particular members are the strength; salus populi (the people’s safety) its business; counsellors, by whom all things needful for it to know are suggested unto it, are the memory; equity and laws, an artificial reason and will; concord, health; sedition, sickness; and civil war, death. Lastly, the pacts and covenants, by which the parts of this body politic were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that fiat, or the Let us make man, pronounced by God in the Creation. (7)
political pamphlet to be addressed later in the introduction. Even from the beginning of the newly-formed French nation, the English Dissenting poet Anna Lætitia Barbauld (1743-1825) saluted France, in her "On the Expected General Rising of the French Nation in 1792" (1793), using bodily metaphors to convey the picture of the state of France before and after: while "the royal vultures" seemed eager to "tear" France's "mangled breast" (ll. 5-6), Barbauld calls France to "extend" her "hands" so that "every hand may crush a foe" (ll. 17-8). France is imagined as the "home" (ll. 28) whose "relenting arms" (ll. 25) will embrace her "wretched outcasts" (ll. 24). Similarly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge mentions in his "France: an Ode" (1798) the moment when France "in wrath her giant-limbs upreared/ And with that oath, which smote air, earth, and sea, / Stamped her strong foot and said she would be free" (ll. 22-4). As it seems, the image of France as a body with giant limbs and strong foot frames Coleridge's revolutionary enthusiasm.

From whence do metaphors of the body spring, though? The question of the suitability of imagining the nation as body certainly relates to the general preoccupation with the body as a source of knowledge and the centre of empirical enquiry, what Charles Wolfe and Ofer Gal call "Embodied Empiricism" (1), that dominated critical and philosophical thinking from approximately the 1660s onwards. Assuredly, the vast range of meanings surrounding the body and the huge interest it excited is quite impossible to be pinned down to even a few points, but it is largely relevant that both Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Protestantism (Wolfe and Gal 1) conferred to the body and the individual a special position as the centre of philosophical and moral unity. From the moment the dead body in particular became the protagonist of the anatomist's table, it was transformed into a source of fascination that gathered in itself a whole procession of associations. Both the "object of

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3 For more information, see Wolfe and Gal's *The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge* (2006), as well as Francis Bacon's texts in *Francis Bacon: Selected Philosophical Works* (1999), edited by Rose-Mary Sargent.

4 Indicatively, Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), an English member of Parliament and prominent recorder of the heated events of his time, wrote in his diary: "After dinner Dr. Scarborough took some of his friends, and I went
particular 'sciences'" and "the primary instrument of empirical knowledge" (Wolfe and Gal 3), the body found its way into the eighteenth century as a discursive site informing, as Veronica Kelly and Dorothea Von Mücke contend, "fundamental cultural activities" (1) produced by the Enlightenment mentality. In detail, Kelly and Von Mücke attach the rise of "secular modes of thought" (10) to a carefully constructed "natural" body whose construction, not accidentally, coincides with an intense study of semiotics (10) as an upcoming science based on the nature of the sign. Semiotics and the body, Kelly and Von Mücke conclude, animate each other in their interrelatedness (10): the body becomes utilized as a proliferator of signs/meanings and the sign acquires a physicality that renders it a source of enquiry: hence the "natural" body and the "natural" sign. The mere existence of the concept of the "natural" body, however, alerts to the historicity of the body as a concept essentially constructed by disciplinary practices and discourses that thrust it into existence; it is exactly this historicity of the body that the influential writings of Michel Foucault strove to unearth and explore.

What seems most relevant to our discussion in Foucault's study of the history of the body is his genealogical approach, which I am to follow in the course of my analysis, and by which he wishes, as he claims in his "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and Power" (1986), "to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history’s destruction of the body" (83). In a series of books like The Birth of the Clinic (1963), Discipline and Punish (1975), and The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (1976) (followed by three other volumes), which add to his renowned The Archaeology of Knowledge (1969), Foucault disentangles the figure of the body as a stable, pre-existing entity and exposes its construction mechanisms by a variety of conversing discourses that have rendered it normative, and have delineated its

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along with them, to see the body alone; which we did; he was a lusty fellow, a seaman that was hanged for a robbery. I did touch the dead body with my bare hand; it felt cold, but methought it was a very unpleasant sight" (49).
carefully sketched outlines by engendering it into "a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions" (*Discipline and Punish* 11). At the same time, these practices distinguished the normative body from an Other, deviant body that had to be controlled and punished. The body, in other words, figures as a source of knowledge that at the same time produces the body itself, the "normal" body of the self. This juxtaposition and marked interdependence of the normative and the abnormal/diseased, amply expressed in both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, is certainly applicable to constructions of the body politic and its carefully defined borders and spaces. Being prominent as a representational tool during the outbreak of the Revolution in France and afterwards, for example, the body as a metaphor kept "fashioning a narrative of its own origins, of its coming into the world," as well as its death and the birth of a new body (de Baecque 4) subject to its own discourses and regulations, and always in relation to the other diseased/malfunctioned body. More than that, according to de Baecque, the metaphor of the body nourishes the "illusion of an organic ordering of the human community" that also offers the ones who study it "a scientific claim to observe it and organize it" (6).

The word "organic" activates the previous statement, and conveniently relates to arguments about the concept of Romantic nationalism developed somewhat uneasily as a response to the turbulence of the times and the remaking of the concept of the nation. Indeed, the Romantic period witnessed a profound ambivalence between pro and anti-Revolution sentiments and their effects at home. Launching a conservative attack on the proponents of the French Revolution, therefore, Burke sketches in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)\(^5\) a sentimental picture of the proper body politic, a national body permeated by unity and virtue, as opposed to what he constantly refers to throughout his pamphlet as the monstrous constitution of France (224), and the deformities (128) and "abominable"

\(^5\) Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* will be subsequently referred to as *Reflections*.
anomalies (129) caused by the French Revolution. What interests me are the metaphors Burke uses to show how "the body politic can act in its true genius and character" (249) and present to the world "its collective virtue," as well as "that virtue which may characterize those who move it and are, as it were, its life and guiding principle" (249). Evidently, the words/phrases "body politic," "collective," and "virtue" pose in line with Burke's general portrayal of the national body as natural and unified, the "constituent parts" (8) of which are called to hold the virtue of the whole organic body together through the homage to be constantly paid to the forefathers, and by preserving what Burke calls "the nature of the original plant" (99). The old hand of law, however, is precisely what fires the reaction to the old regimes and fuels the supporters of the Revolution in Britain like Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley's mother, who sharply respond to Burke's ideas. In this vein, Paine enumerates in his Rights of Man (1791) the reasons why Burke "has been mistaken and disappointed in his opinions" on "the affairs of France" (164). By contrast, throughout Reflections Burke develops a discourse of natural unity by employing what Marlon B. Ross perceives, in his analysis of the poetics of Romantic nationalism, as the metaphor of "organic growth" (56) that existed alongside an equally prevalent fear of discontinuity (56) caused by the changes and imperial expansions in Britain.

It is the same organic growth/unity that permeated the philosophy of the older generation of Romantics like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who

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6 The history of the debate Burke's account triggered is well known, as is well known that Richard Price himself, a Dissenting preacher whose speech to the Revolution Society on 4 November 1789 in favor of the Revolution, hailed the English Revolution of 1688 and stirred Burke's response.

7 See Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Men (1789), and Thomas Paine's Rights of Man (1791).

8 Burke's account of the Revolution is one of many, unfolded as narratives/ readings of the Revolution, that yielded a palpable effect on the perception of the Revolution itself; as Marilyn Butler argues, Burke "does deliver the Revolution as a story" and includes his own predictions about its ending (7). More than that, the reality of the Revolution was substantiated through the dialogue between and among discourses that told different and conflicting tales from different social classes and allegiances. Impressive, for instance, is the story recounted by Butler of the baron de Vassal et de Gily, from south-west France, whose response to the "demonstration against the landlords" (10) witnessed in his area carries with it a whole range of meanings initiated from the riots as "the form of a narrative" (10); this narrative, according to Butler, "represents social relations in the past, present and future" (10).
structure their writings around an organic mentality centred in art and culture and extended to politics; through the almost magical touch of the imagination, Coleridge suggests, the composing parts of a poem "mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement" (Biographia Literaria 481). It is as if England as a Romantic nation features broadly as a proportionally harmonious and perfectly unified poem. Many of Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798) poems stand as examples of this evocation of nativity, unity, and pervading Englishness. After his genuinely enthusiastic response to the French revolutionary cause in 1789, Wordsworth's almost first-hand experience of its subsequent horrors and the imminent danger France as an Other, hostile country posed for England, augmented a patriotic mentality that infused deeply his poetry with sonnets like "Composed in the Valley near Dover, on the Day of Landing" (1802), where the patriotic feeling bursts to hail England as the mother country. Wordsworth's patriotism entails paying tribute to the "native soil" (ll.1) that the narrator encounters on his return to England, a country where "All, all are English" (ll. 6) and which still preserves its integrity despite the fact that "Europe is yet in bonds" (ll. 9). By creating a self-enclosed narrative space that contains the harmonizing principles that suffuse England through what Ross calls the "pastoral union of people and land" (61), Wordsworth goes a long way from the outward greetings by which he addressed the advent of the Revolution. While back then, as he confessed in The Prelude (1805), Wordsworth saw "France standing at the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming

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9 The names "England" and "Britain" are to be used somewhat interchangeably throughout the thesis, since the English were "the principal managers of a polity and society that included not just English but Welsh, Irish and Scottish" (184), as Krishan Kumar rightly claims. But while Kumar says that in this context "national identity was not and could not be a major concern" (184), the extent to which English identity (albeit in the general framework of British identity) strived to assert itself against the external other cannot be underestimated. In this case, the term "nationalism" may seem inadequate in discussions of English nationhood, but it is nevertheless a useful term to go with "patriotism" in the face of external threat. After all, the English, as Kumar argues, lie at the centre of Britain's power during that time. And, in any case, as Halberstam stresses, at the advent of the English Empire brought "the concept of the 'foreign'," a kind of "parasitical monstrosity" of others like Jews and Irish in the minds of the English people.
"born again" (ll. 340-1), both he and Coleridge encountered the later revolutionary years through the Reign of Terror and after with abhorrence, caution, and a disgust about the devastating hand of war itself especially for Englishmen: "evil days" Coleridge warns, "Are coming on us, O my countrymen!" (Fears in Solitude\textsuperscript{10} ll. 124-5).

In the context of imminent war, societies were founded as a protection measure against revolutionary ideas, like "The Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers" by John Reeves. War with France, thus, threatened the quite impossible organic harmony upheld and perpetrated through the discourses of the early Romantics. It comes as no surprise that their literary testaments betray the underlying webs of contradictions, fragmentariness, anxieties and fears that pervaded their own times, and are again reflected on the body. Satirists took the opportunity to comment on this divisiveness and fragmentariness with imaginative sketches, like James Gillray's famous The Contrast (1793), where Gillray interestingly depicts Britain and France as female bodies whose features and qualities are being contrasted with each other (Fig. 1). In Gillray's case, too, one finds ample proof for the way the body offers a powerful means of representing the political clashes of the times; in The Contrast, the effectiveness of Gillray's political commentary owes much to the way these two female bodies are portrayed.

Evidently, life through the turbulent period of the Revolution in France following a similar but equally influential American Revolution (1765-83) was not only accompanied but also nourished by discursive formations of what constituted proper nationhood that also created the appropriate framework for a change in what the body politic actually was. This "regime of truth," as Foucault calls it in his "Truth and Power,"\textsuperscript{11} is the driving force which enables "one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned" (131), namely the healthy body politic from the sick or dead body politic, whatever this came

\textsuperscript{10} Written in 1798, under the fear of the French invading the country.

\textsuperscript{11} Included in his Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1980).
to mean during and after a wave of changes that (re)created the idea of the nation. Of course, attempts to answer questions like "What is a nation?" border on the impossible, yet theorists like E. J. Hobsbaum and Homi Bhabha can prove useful for sketching what included the idea of nationhood and its ambiguous fluidity as a concept. Back in the age of the American and the French Revolutions, the nation, according to Hobsbaum, "was the body of citizens whose collective sovereignty constituted them a state which was their political expression" (19). 

Swiss philosopher Jean Jacque Rousseau was indeed among the first to refer to the concept of the body politic and the imperative need for its sustenance by the people themselves; in the third book of his *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (1762), Rousseau writes:

> The body politic, as well as the human body, begins to die as soon as it is born, and carries in itself the causes of its destruction. But both may have a constitution that is more or less robust and suited to preserve them a longer or a shorter time. The constitution of man is the work of nature; that of the State the work of art. It is not in men’s power to prolong their own lives; but it is for them to prolong as much as possible the life of the State, by giving it the best possible constitution. The best constituted State will have an end; but it will end later than any other, unless some unforeseen accident brings about its untimely destruction. (n. pag.)

Like the human body, the body politic is caught within its own circle of life, and requires for its maintenance the constant and prolific labour of its members, the people themselves.

Thus, in a single paragraph, Rousseau insightfully brings together and fuses the body politic, the human body, the people, and the state. John Stuart Mill (1806-73) also underlines in his own way, half a century after the French Revolution, the connection of people to nation/state, especially in his "On Liberty" (1869), the introduction to which recounts the
story of the connection between the will of the people and "the will of the nation" (n. pag.). This connection becomes a crucial part in the general effort to talk about nationhood. Alongside the people-nation dynamic, it is useful to refer to Hobsbaum, who talks about defining the nation in terms of border formation/expansion, its history and "a fairly lengthy" past (37), its culture and economy, and other similar criteria that legitimate the viability of nationhood. It is especially in Shelley's *The Last Man*, as will be seen in the course of my thesis, that Shelley addresses the question of what constitutes the English nation after the dissolution of the national borders and the mobility of the English people in their effort to escape the grip of the Plague. The way the idea of nationhood itself is renegotiated in the novel leads to questions of the legitimacy of the English as a nation, especially in their encounter with the other outside of themselves. Patriotism stems from exactly this attempt for what Ernst Gellner sees as a nation-state's "political legitimacy" (1) that differentiates the nation's self from an other, brings the social body together and creates bonds of "voluntary adherence and identification, loyalty, solidarity" but also control and coercion (53). This kind of identification with national identity happens both through the existence of what Benedict Anderson calls "large cultural systems" (19), and through what Bhabha calls narrating and disseminating the nation by holding culture "at its most productive position" (4). The cultural practices developed by a certain people are a crucial factor in developing a sense of national identity and holding together the social body, mostly by including what is other to self as a reference point for the self. The idea of the social body, however, is reworked in a quite different way from the perspective of Mary Shelley as a woman writer, inheritor and participant in a cultural revolution stemming from the Revolution in France and including the female voice at its most prominent.

Mary Shelley certainly includes the self/other dichotomy in both *The Last Man* and *Frankenstein* in presenting England as a dead or monstrous body that is always in a tense
relation with ideas of healthy nationhood, and at the same time fractured by them. According to Bhabha, the other is never outside the self (4), and discourses around Britishness and the unity of the national body became inseparable from arguments about France, as Linda Colley contends, "as Britain's most dangerous and obvious enemy" (321). While Colley refers to only several of many instances where the self/other differentiation is applied from the eighteenth century onwards (religion being one of the most prevalent), Shelley utilizes the self/other tension to ignite questions about what informs an unhealthy/dead body politic, always in connection to national and gender discursive frameworks. At the same time, Shelley's work uncannily resonates Burke's dark prophesy of a new, monstrous body politic that threatens the idea of normative nationhood:

    The very same vice assumes a new body. The spirit transmigrates; and, far from losing its principle of life by the change of its appearance, it is renovated in its new organs with a fresh vigor of a juvenile activity. It walks abroad; it continues its ravages, whilst you are gibbeting the carcass or demolishing the tomb. You are terrifying yourself with ghosts and apparitions, whilst your house is the haunt of robbers. (Reflections 183)

Shelley, however, as will be observed, appropriates the idea of monstrosity in Frankenstein in its capability to embody her own political agenda about the politics of inclusion/exclusion dictated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and pertaining to women and their position within the body politic. The general portrayal of the body politic as a deviant/dead body in Shelley's texts, however, is structured upon terrains of the Gothic.

    By encompassing the monstrous or dead body at the heart of her narratives, as will be subsequently discussed, Shelley evokes a version of the Gothic that relies on the body both as a discursive site, recipient of disciplinary practices and instigator of subversiveness, and as the main target of her audience's reactions, namely what Ellen Moers perceives, in her
discussion of the Female Gothic, as "the physiological reactions to fear" (77). But more than that, the employment of the Gothic betrays something more than a strategic trope by which to talk about the state of the nation in Shelley's texts; rather, the Gothic pervades both

*Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* as a discursive space whereby the inherent workings of the nation's body are laid open. In both texts, what David Punter says about the Gothic is true: the "Gothic knows the body . . . well," it "knows about its physical fragility, about vulnerability" (*Gothic Pathologies* 9). Likewise, the national body is exposed as vulnerable. In both narratives, evidently, this fragility lays out the national body's contradictions and instabilities, at the simultaneous moment the body comes in contact with its "dangerous" other. All this is developed within what Fred Botting perceives as the in-between spaces that the Gothic inhabits between "limit and transgression" (6), as the themes of both order and disorder, self and other, living and dead, are taken up in mutual dialogue and mutual self-negation. It is in narrative spaces like this that the Gothic configures a national body filled with political inflections. After all, the combination of the Gothic body and political commentary is not new: A few years earlier, William Blake had written *The French Revolution* (1791) – only one book of which survives – about the decline of the sovereign power in France, a similarly Gothic narrative about the Revolution whose crux is the figure of the dead body even from its very beginning: "THE DEAD brood over Europe," and the prince lies "sick, sick" "on his couch." In fact, the sickness of the king reflects itself on the sickness of landscape itself that fits into the general narrative space dominated by "howlings, despair, and black night," figures desolate with their hands cut off, and "flesh decay'd." Blake follows a Gothic discursive scheme that anticipates the one inherent in Shelley's novels.

In this and many other ways, Mary Shelley's response to the Revolution adds to a rather large network of writings, products of the anxieties induced by the Revolutionary wave of changes urging themselves well into the nineteenth century. The legacy left by works like
Burke's *Reflections*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1789) and her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), as well as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) and William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) informs Shelley's novels as products of a revolutionary age inevitably preoccupied with the reconfiguration of the body politic in general through the "transition" from the "body of the king to the great 'body of citizens'" (de Baecque 8) witnessed in France. Obviously, she is not the only one; the revolutionary spirit appealed to by the second generation of Romantic poets affects the writings of her husband, Percy Shelley, who, in works like *Queen Mab* (1812-3), *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), and *Hellas* (1822), greets and supports within the deeper recesses of his poetry the radical fervor that is also the herald of profound change. Yet even in the idealistic, transcendental world of *Queen Mab* one finds ample expression of metaphors of death, disease, and monstrosity that render the atmosphere of the poem Gothic and draw on the figure of the nation as body: the Fairy sketches a pervading landscape of war where "scattered arms, / And lifeless warriors" (4.63-4) mark ambition's path, and a "desolate society" (4.107) that is poisoned "through the bloodless veins" (4.106) by "Kings, priests, and statesmen" (4.6.104). More than that, Percy Shelley refers to selfishness as something embodied, a monster "spiritless" (5.25) whose "deformity" (5.27) and "unattractive lineaments" "scare" (5.29), repel, and add to the general state of mankind as "the disease" (4.165) that entails "famine, frenzy, woe and penury" (4.177), a "pestilence" (4.188) as threatening and devastating as the Plague of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*. The figure of diseased/dead embodiment in questions of politics may not be as abundant in Percy Shelley's poetry in the way it does in his wife's novels, but it constitutes part of a large body of Romantic texts that rely on similar metaphors to bring forth their narrative. The dominance of the dead body in all its grotesque physicality, for example, is quite evident in Lord Byron's
poetry, especially in his depiction of Greece as a dead woman, or the omnipotent presence of
the fallen dead themselves along with their inextricable relation to their native place.

Dead bodies indeed abound in Romantic literature. In her analysis of the way the dead
are used in Romantic texts, Amy Gates notices that it is not the lack of dead
bodies that provokes a lack of interest and study of them and the presence of the grave in the
literature of the period (18). On the contrary, as Gates claims, it is a fact that "the literature of
the period, like the urban graveyards of the time, may be more overcrowded with bodies and
graves than the literature that comes before or after" (Gates' emphasis 18-9). Unlike the way
the dead are utilized in mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century narratives, however, Gates
infers that Romantic writers tend to exploit their dead and their burial places "for exploratory
instead of explicitly hortatory purposes" (19). Whereas eighteenth-century poetry focused on
the general culture of Sensibility, and included the rather didactic mode of Graveyard poetry
with its emphasis on the dead, Romantic literature politicized the dead in a quite unique way.
This means that the dead of Romanticism stray considerably from what Eric Parisot sees as a
"didactic sentiment via reflections upon death" (9) that fit the general "moral precepts" of
sentimentality/sensibility, as Henry Martin Lloyd calls them, and is definitely observed in
poets like Thomas Gray (1716-71) and Robert Blair (1699-1746). In a different way, for
example, Byron's dead are caught in an indispensable political association with the place in
which they are buried, and their physical decay, as Gates contends, "gives them permanence,
moral and political relevance, and a potential future with the living" (29). Indeed, both The
Giaour (1813) and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-18) stand as firm examples not only of
the way "some warrior's half-forgotten grave" (CH 2.814) becomes the urge aiming to thrust
modern Greeks into battle, but also of the way Greece as a country is represented as a corpse,

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12 Thomas Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard (1751) and Robert Blair's The Grave (1743)
constitute two of the most indicative examples of the ethics of Graveyard Poetry.
particularly a female corpse both "coldly sweet," and "deadly fair" (*The Giaour* 92). The particular gendering of the body of Greece is extremely relevant (and will be analyzed further) to my discussion of the way Mary Shelley introduces the concept of gender regarding the formation of the body politic, especially in the figure of the female monster in *Frankenstein*.

The way the body politic is represented in *Frankenstein* will constitute the focus in the first chapter of my thesis. Specifically, I will look into the way Shelley places in mutual confrontation the normative body of nationhood as represented by Victor Frankenstein and his family, with its own monstrous body/offspring that is also the expression of the "normal," human body's inner fissures. What happens when these two bodies mutually create each other, and mutually destroy each other at the same time? Why does the possibility of even thinking about a monster-family threaten the "normal" as a supposedly unmolested imaginary community? Most of all, what do the corpses of Elizabeth and the dead female monster signify about the construction of a functional/dysfunctional family/nation? The cultural revolution in Britain that Shelley participated in was greatly advanced by the mentality of the French revolutionary spirit and formed spaces for the female voice, at the same time that the separation of the spheres assigned a specific role to women and prescribed their political role within society. The so-called "domesticity and the domestic affections" (110) that Gary Kelly observes and that pervaded middle-class ethics relegated women to the position of protectors of the home, and "the presiding genius of the 'national character'" (Kelly 110); it is along these lines that Shelley employs the monstrous/dead body in *Frankenstein* in order to contest preconceived ideas of the nation as home, and present her own political ideas. A striking example comes towards the end of the novel, where the mangled body of the female creature lies at the bottom of the lake, a symbolic moment highly interrelated with Victor Frankenstein's earlier dream of his dead bride/mother:
Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed. (*F 57)*

The analysis of passages like this in *Frankenstein* is to rely on the mutual dialogue between the two female bodies, and how these reflect a tense conversation between the self and the other, the "normal" and the monstrous body politic, and the female role in constructing a workable community.

Following this, the second chapter of my thesis will deal with the way Shelley handles the idea of the healthy versus the dead body politic, in relation to the very idea of nationhood as a viable body, in *The Last Man*. After all, death, politics, and writing featured as constant companions in Shelley's life; the death of three of her children, along with the death of her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1822 and the heavy legacy her parents left her, according to Esther Schor, as "visionaries of social renovation" (1),14 combined with a busy life of "reading and writing, isolation and anxiety" (Schor 1) to shape the literary mind of a woman that channeled many of her fears, contradictions, and ideas into these two narratives. In the context of the dead body as a metaphor for the English nation, some of the central issues to be addressed in *The Last Man* are: the way nationhood as an idea(l) is negotiated through the narratives, the role of the people in sustaining the idea of nationhood, and the body of the nation in connection to space and mobility in a world inflicted by the Plague. Already, the idea of consolidated nationhood in the context of imperial expansion especially after the 1800s seems heavily contested by a simultaneous effort for self-definition and expansion, and

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13 For the sake of brevity, Shelley's *Frankenstein* will be referred to as *F* in the parentheses.
14 Taken from the Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* (2003).
The Last Man greatly echoes these concerns, reveals the problematics of nationhood/imperialism, and discusses the possibility of re-affirming the English nation even in a post-apocalyptic world. This is to be done through the maintenance of cultural memory by the English people. By cultural memory I mean memory permeating what Anthony Smith perceives as a community possessing shared myths and memories, a "common public culture, and common laws and customs" (13). Is this to be preserved after the death of the body politic in The Last Man?

Seen more broadly, what makes the English nation a community in Mary Shelley's novel? Corpses constantly multiply at the same time that the plague progresses and people travel from place to place. England is left behind lying in her own tomb, a decaying corpse mourned by Verney, who witnesses and laments the lifelessness of Britain (The Last Man 261). The particular lamentation fits the general culture of mourning in the novel that brings the people together and raises questions about the role of the dead in preserving these bonds. Do the uprooted English people sustain the English nation? Is cultural memory validated even in the course of mobility? Is the nation its space, its people, or both?

In all this, the metaphor of the nation as body is largely projected at the centre of Shelley's questionings. Indeed, the body as metaphor visualizes Shelley's thoughts, concerns, and ideas about past, present, and future. De Baecque's book contains an interesting quotation by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737-1814), a French nineteenth-century writer, that says:

We would not see the light of the sun if it were not
intercepted by bodies, or at least by clouds. It escapes us in
the absence of any atmosphere and blinds us at its source.
The same is true for truth; we would not grasp it if it did not
fix on perceptible events, or at least on metaphors and
comparisons that reflect it; it needs a body to reflect it. (2)
Thus de Saint-Pierre wrote in his *The Indian Cottage* (1791), and his words give proof of the power of metaphor to embody the way the events in France and in Britain were perceived. More than anything, the body metaphor allows "the tale of the Revolution to take shape" (de Baecque 2). It is not that metaphor provides a direct path towards the "truth" as Saint-Pierre means it, but it is surely a way to comprehend the events conditioning Mary Shelley's narratives. This is why I believe in the linguistic usefulness of the metaphor and the simultaneous creation of a symbol by a metaphor, a process in itself caught within discursive practices.
Chapter 1

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: National Body-Doubles

1.1. The Spirit of the Age

The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it . . . [T]hey are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest. (52)

John Locke, "Of the Beginning of Political Societies," from *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1689)

I trembled and my heart failed within me, when, on looking up, I saw by the light of the moon the daemon at the casement. A ghastly grin wrinkled his lips as he gazed on me, where I sat fulfilling the task which he had allotted to me. Yes, he had followed me in my travels; he had loitered in forests, hid himself in caves, or taken refuge in wide and desert heaths; and he now came to mark my progress and claim the fulfillment of my promise. (*F* 161)

In this chapter, I will focus on politicized national narratives disrupted or, at least, intruded upon, by their monstrous and infamous *doppelgängers*. By national narratives I mean the interlocking narratives that construe the body politic in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Particularly, I am going to look into the way the English national body is structured upon a masculine conception of a body that is primarily ancestral, Protestant, and imperial, resistant to the "danger" of its monstrous others, whether these others refer to the French, the imperial subjects, or the feminine as threat. These monstrous doubles constitute "the daemon at the casement" (*F* 161), the constant presence beside and within the normative body politic, overseeing the actions of the latter. As a result, I am going to enquire into what Chris Baldick terms "the politics of monstrosity" (10) with a twist. Whereas Baldick structures his informative *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and*...

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15 By using the term "doppelgängers," I am referring to doubles. In her discussion of Gothic literature, Sue Chaplin explains the concept of "the double" (234), which appears in many instances "as a character distinct from the protagonist who nevertheless comes to represent an aspect of the protagonist's often conflicted, unstable identity" (234). A variation of this concept is the doppelgänger, "a physical replica" of a person who is deemed a death omen (235). The idea of the double as approached by Chaplin, and variably linked to Freud's theory of the uncanny (a "repressed memory" returning to haunt the person in question) (236-7), is vividly echoed in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In the case of *Frankenstein*, doubling is a constitutive feature that allows the simultaneous development of national and anti-national narratives.
Nineteenth-century Writing (1987) on a broad trajectory that includes various utilizations of the monster trope, together with the political inflections that monstrosity carries, I will unfold my analysis on the concept of the nation as a monstrous body. Indeed, although it is evident that monstrosity and the body inform and define each other in indispensable ways, the concept of corporeality will be central in my argument because of its close relevance to Shelley's appropriation of the Gothic, monstrous body as a political metaphor for the English body politic. As a metaphor, that is, the body as nation in *Frankenstein* develops as part in the huge trail of bodily associations the nation invited during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a rather unique way, *Frankenstein* turns the current image of the nation as a healthy, organic body on its head in order to reveal an interposing monstrous body that enacts the nation's worst nightmares. In order to unravel the interweaving narratives that bring the normative and the monstrous political body in mutual self-definition, I will examine how Shelley negotiates the ethics of the domestic as the centre of the political body of England by employing the corporeal. In this case, not only does Frankenstein's familial body represent a certain preconception of family/nationhood, but it also produces its abortive child whose own familial body is rendered impossible by the very monstrosity that also causes the destruction of the doubly threatening, foreign body of the female monster; in Frankenstein's world, the monstrous familial/national body stays on the margins, if it ever comes to life. Even on the margins, nonetheless, it persists as a loud reminder of the nation's innermost contradictions. Frankenstein's laboratory seems to acquire even greater significance in this context as a space where the "normal" body melts down to reveal "the work of muscles and arteries beneath" (*F* 56) its seemingly adamant facade.

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16 Especially after the Revolutionary Years, and as a product of the Napoleonic Wars that dominated the first decades of the 1800s, Britain was exposed to be "a nation" primarily "at war with itself" (55), as will be seen and as Philip Shaw argues. Indeed, this "newly forged sense of nationhood" (Shaw 55) that pervades English politics after the French Revolution is conditioned by a pervading ethics of war sustained both by dichotomies of self and enemy (France) and the nation's inherent ruptures. Shelley's *Frankenstein* will be approached as a novel that reflects the socio-political tensions that brought it forth into existence.
The concept of the organic nation is intriguingly addressed by British philosopher John Locke when he refers to "the bonds of civil society" under "one body," "one community" (Locke's emphasis 52): in fact, Locke's account of the way these bonds invite men (my emphasis) into this "community" of peace, comfort, and safety, inevitably leads to a short history of the formation of "one body politic" (Locke's emphasis 52) in his "Of the Beginning of Political Societies," comprised almost uniformly by "the consent of every individual" (52), whose civil ethics stem from the family as institution and as tie. According to Locke, the political body that is born can "move" (52) only through the mutual support/consent of its members. At the same time, the carefully structured communities that emerge are defined exclusively in relation to the foreign others that are kept distinctly outside the ideological boundaries of nationhood. Locke explicitly refers to those that are "not of" those generic communities (52), and traces the way members are "incorporated"17 (56) into an organic unity whose "defence against foreign invasions and injuries" (57) is paramount. If what constitutes a nation/community and its others is pervasive in a 1690s Enlightenment treatise like Locke's, it thrusts itself even more forcefully after the French and the American Revolutions and the newly-emergent concept of the nation-state; even more urgently, it introduces itself, according to Shaw, along with the "concepts of nationality and patriotism" as "products of the Napoleonic era" (50). Especially after the 1800s, English society becomes even more militant against France as an external other, and confronts its own conflicting disposition as it struggles for simultaneous self-assertion and imperial expansion.

This urgent need for self-validation by the English nation would not have been the case if it was not for an equally powerful sense of fragmentation detectable especially after the French Revolution and the gradual development of the British Empire. Particularly during the years of Terror, dissenting voices were a primary nuisance to the government; as William

17 Notice Locke's interesting choice of verb, since the word "incorporate" betrays the usefulness of the corporeal metaphor in discussions of nationhood and community formation in general.
Hazlitt argues in his *The Spirit of the Age: or, Contemporary Portraits* (1825), "[t]he spirit of monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age. The flame of liberty, the light of intellect, was to be extinguished with the sword" (74). The wave of "[e]xtra-parliamentary opposition," that continued well into the 1830s, and, as Michael Scrivener suggests, included "the Bill of Rights Society, the county association movement, the Society for Constitutional Information, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and various anti-slavery societies" (49) sought to fight inequalities and authoritarian control that nevertheless proliferated actions against "the democratic radicals" (50). The othering that becomes an indispensable part of self-definition extends from exclusionary politics regarding the issue of representation and human rights to social inequalities towards imperial subjects. The latter fits the general practices adopted by the British Empire, and explains greatly the way Britain was torn between what Marlon Ross calls "national development" and "territorial acquisition" that in the minds of the English goes hand in hand with "the notion of historical progress" (56). The nation as organism enters the picture at exactly this moment when the concept of the "motherland" emerges, a progressing, "nurturing place" (Ross 56) that embraces its people and that also finds expression in Shelley's *The Last Man*, as I suggest in the next chapter. The way empire implicates itself in relation to the body politic is even more vivid in *The Last Man*, as will be seen, yet it also accounts to a great extent for the inherent contradictions of English nationhood as contested in *Frankenstein*, and the notion of othering it introduces.

According to Ross, England finds itself torn between "its relation to its past menaced by the French Revolutionary zeal to begin anew," the threat Napoleon poses to the borders, as well as "its own conflictual desire to mimic Napoleon and to silence him, to enlarge its own borders but without losing its identity in relation to the exotic-external that defines its nationality" (57). In *The Last Man*, for instance, Shelley performs successfully this
ambivalence between an idealization of English national identity, and an abrupt, simultaneous realization of its vulnerability especially when in contact with imperial others.

This peculiarly co-dependent relationship between self and other creates two conflicting but co-developing narratives that render the body of England volatile and porous. Evidently, the body of England exists in a symbiotic relationship with its monstrous doubles, and Shelley's project seems to be to uncover the underlying dialogue. Both she and her husband Percy Shelley witnessed the "great and extraordinary events" (*History of a Six Weeks' Tour* 21) that followed the coming of the French Revolution, and the state of things at home. They saw the rise and fall of Napoleon's devouring ambition, and the despotism that pervaded Europe afterwards. According to Pamela Clemit, the Shelleys visited several places that included targets of Napoleon's army, and Geneva, Rousseau's birthplace, a 1816 visit that, as Clemit claims, prompted Shelley's reflection on "that revolution, which . . . notwithstanding the temporary bloodshed and injustice . . . , has produced enduring benefits" (qtd. in Clemit 30). Towards the end of the year 1816, the Shelleys preoccupied themselves with the happenings "at home, notably the savage government response to the last phase of Luddite uprisings (1811-16), in which workers in the manufacturing industries united to destroy the machines which threatened their livelihood, and to the Spa Fields riot of December 1816" (Clemit 30).

Frankenstein's monster, therefore, joins Frankenstein's narrative to bring to the surface the turbulent state of England as body. But how does a discussion about the national body of England concern a novel actually set in Geneva, Switzerland, and designed as a travel narrative far away from the concept of the home? To answer this question is to refer to the centrality of Geneva as a representational place that offers several points of identification; Patrick Vincent infers an illuminating account of how eighteenth-century Geneva emerges as a "relatively peaceful Protestant enclave," an epitome of "natural order," eventually swept by
a revolutionary outcry that in its turn caused reaction (646). In Geneva's state Shelley found a "city-republic" as "a sort of case study for the political tensions and hypocrisies that were coming to a head in British society (Vincent 647). Hence, whereas Vincent steps on the representation Geneva makes possible to further his analysis on the viability of the penal systems, I suggest that Geneva as Frankenstein's birthplace and point of reference advances Shelley's comments on the home front. This kind of imaginative displacement subtly but pointedly helps recreate the state of the English nation as home/family, which comes to be shuttered the moment Frankenstein deviates from its centre, and the pursuit/mobility of the victim/victimizer begins. In such a setting, Frankenstein presents itself as a socio-political commentary on the state of England during the early 1800s.

Frankenstein is, consequently, a product of turbulent times; the monstrous intrudes from start to finish, and it does so to "alter forever the comfort of domestic privacy" (Halberstam 15). Along these lines, it does not seem to be the case that the narratives of normalcy/domesticity/nationhood on the one hand, and monstrosity on the other, develop successively; rather, they develop simultaneously in mutual co-dependence. The discursive construction of these clashing bodies, then, as well as their mutual reflection/destruction, will be my primary focus; in the context of this vital interdependence, I will look into the way the masculine idea of a traditional, Protestant, imperial body politic centres on the family as its symbol and its pillar. Frankenstein's family, as will be claimed, poses an image of a "healthy" body politic that actually mothers monsters made out of dead bodies stitched together incongruously through "the science of anatomy" (F 50) and "physiology" (F 50). The creature speaks, and tells double stories of inclusion/exclusion from the in-between spaces that delineate the dichotomy; further than that, the creature is neither alive nor dead, but always a dynamic embodiment of a fragmentary, fissured society. At the heart of this society lies the family, and its relation to/intrusion/reconfiguration by the monstrous corpus starts
from the general premise also developed by Burke that the English constitution is internally linked to "domestic ties," whereby the "law" and the "family affections" (*Reflections* 102) become one.

As it seems, Frankenstein's creature represents the Gothic body of transgression and unruliness that is more than what comes against law and order in the societal organism; it is England's other body, the body-double that, as Halberstam contends, "will find you in the intimacy of your own home; indeed, it will make your home its home" (15). In this context, the word "home" rises as an echo of the way the notion of England as a nation-state/family was turned into a prevalent mentality in the minds of the English people. In his illuminating study of the homeland, for example, David Fallon traces inflections of patriotic and nationalist feeling in the poetry of William Blake, whose ambivalent feelings towards the nation may seem "contradictory" (216) at times, but always reliant on a conception of the nation "as homeland" (216) that will smooth the way for the coming of a new Jerusalem. Especially after the emergence of the term "nation" in the late 1790s, a drive towards the formation of collectivity especially against the enemies of the home – the danger of the French invading the carefully construed borders of the island both in 1798 and during 1803-05 becomes even more imminent – betrays an emanating imagining of nationhood based on "defensive terms" (Fallon 203). Even right after the outbreak of the French Revolution, as I have argued in the introduction, works like Burke’s *Reflections* and his *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796) fuel the reaction against any revolutionary feelings that might threaten the tranquility of the home.¹⁸ Conspicuous targets of this reaction like Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Paine, and John Thelwall are continuously attacked and countered by reactionary works like Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-8) that, as Scrivener argues, "were distributed to

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¹⁸ See William Wordsworth's "Home at Grasmere," from his *The Recluse* (1880), and how he addresses the concepts of community, home, and belonging. Felicia Hemans's "The Homes of England"(1828) is also an indicative example.
labourers to counter the influence of Thomas Paine” (51). The force that patriotism gains during the beginning of the nineteenth century is unprecedented, and reactionary feeling affects not only previous radicals like Wordsworth, and Coleridge, but also unconverted radicals like Blake and Thelwall (Scrivener 53). In the midst of the unrest, and mostly during and after the Reign of Terror, "seditious libel" charges (Scrivener 54) become all the more frequent, and fit the general patriotic atmosphere that endorses anti-jacobin propaganda and is set in contrast to revolutionary aspirations upheld by the London Corresponding Society (founded in 1792), and permeating works like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), *Hellas* (1822), and Byron's *Marino Faliero* (1821), that bring forward the revolutionary spirit so dreaded by defenders of the "home."

As I will argue, and as critics like Chris Baldick and Lee Sterrenburg have argued, Shelley stages this conflict at the advent of the French Revolution and after, and turns *Frankenstein* into a narrative space where conflicting but conversant ideologies clash and explode. It is important, however, that Shelley does so through the corporeal metaphor which is also evident in the revolutionary decades, and the presence of the creature as an abortive amalgamation of disparate parts reveals a significant amount of things about the way the Gothic as a trope hosts tales of selfhood and otherness in the post-revolutionary context. The Gothic enters at this point to signify an inextricable connection to matters of home and nationalism. The Gothic is the home of the experience of "trauma" that Punter sees as exposing "that wound, that primal break" that resists "the fantasies of the whole, uninvaded body, the fully constituted, unassailable home" (174); the same break, Punter argues, that

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19 Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805) constitutes an indicative example of his convergence from a revolutionary enthusiast to losing "All feeling of conviction, and, in fine, / Sick, wearied out with contrarieties," yielding up "moral questions in despair" (ll. 302-4), until his imaginative restoration in the Twelfth Book and his resultant conservatism.

20 Ballads like "A New Patriotic Song" (1803) promoted faith to the British nation and simultaneously betrayed the extent to which French invasion was dreaded.

21 The Gothic also has a strange affiliation with British "national identification" that continues even to this day, according to Punter in his "Home, homeland, and the Gothic" (Home and Nation 2015), with the contemporary focus on Gothic architecture (169) and the preoccupation with Britain's Gothic origins.
Jacques Lacan perceives as existing in the form of a "break in the perfect image" (174). Thus, Shelley describes in her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein* that Victor would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. (F 9)

The monster creeps in, and relegates Victor's seeming tranquility to the realm of fiction. As "cultural artifacts" (48), Anderson suggests, nations and nationalisms are "imagined" (49) and constructed too, imaginative fictions that are deliberately moulded to sustain communal bonds. Within the careful delineation of the English nation after the Revolution as "limited," "sovereign," and communal (Anderson 50), in this case, its contradictions and monstrosities, albeit carefully concealed, loom large in the "bedside" of the national imaginary.

The lurking monster needed warding off chiefly after the French Revolution, and this need to cleanse the national borders from external threat, or, rather, the imperative to link safety at home to war with the other, is eminent throughout William Hazlitt's "Illustrations of Vetus" (1819), who talks about an "exclusive patriotism" (43) that renders "the destruction of an enemy (be he who he may) the indispensable condition of our safety" (40). It is exactly such tensions between balance and imbalance, order and excess, that the Gothic effectively induces, this "uncontrollable and overwhelming power" that Fred Botting perceives as threatening "social standing" and "order" (5). It is neither and both at the same time; order and disorder are both parts of "the Gothic dynamic of limit and transgression" (6). This is
why Frankenstein's creature and his bride embody the perfect way to start a discussion about questions of the body politic during the nineteenth century: they both bring forth this Gothic dynamic, set a mirror image with which to see the conflicting face of English nationhood, and form an impossible, abortive family that stands face to face with organic constructions of the homeland. And they do so, as I shall argue, by inhabiting the in-between spaces of life and death. David Punter's point in his *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, The Body and The Law* (1998) that *Frankenstein* is "about birth through death" (56) seems highly appropriate at this point.
1.2. The Birth of a Monster

Whereas in *The Last Man* Shelley dramatizes a story of the body of England from birth to death and beyond, always in relation to the national, the imperial, and the feminine others that both assert and jeopardize England's organicity, *Frankenstein* delivers a creature whose physical deformity stands for the places England's body inhabits where the boundaries between life and death crumple to reveal what Judith Pike dubs "the sublime body" (Pike's emphasis 154) of the monster. But while, according to Pike, the eighteenth century saw an active "romanticization of the dead body," *Frankenstein* presents us with a "sublime corpse" (my emphasis 154), whose grotesque body foregrounds itself and abhors the beholder. Being sublime, the monster's social identity is first and foremost defined by its Gothic bodiliness.\(^{22}\) Mary Shelley well reminisces in her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein* the context that conditioned her monster's birth during the year without a summer, "the summer of 1816" (*F* 6),\(^{23}\) which her husband Shelley sums up in his 1818 Preface to *Frankenstein* as the Gothic setting that helped bring forth the whole enterprise as a "hideous progeny" (*F* 10). The event of the ghost story competition is well-known, as is the Shelleys' prolonged visit the Villa Diodati where Lord Byron proposed a ghost story competition. In a context like this, the sublime body of the creature comes to life when Frankenstein bestows "animation upon lifeless matter" (*F* 51), after observing "the natural decay and corruption of the human body" (*F* 50): "[o]n a dreary night of November," then, "by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light" (*F* 56), the creature is born, and the description of his body deserves quoting in full length:

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\(^{22}\) The close connection between the sublime and the body is ingeniously elaborated by Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of The Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), in which he ascertains that "WHATEVER is filled in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible . . . is a source of the sublime," whose effect "on the body and mind" is significant.

\(^{23}\) In the course of what proved to be "a wet, ungenial summer" (2), as Shelley confesses in her 1831 introduction, the Shelley Circle spent hours reading and conversing under the gloomy atmosphere of rain and lightning. During Mary Shelley's stay in Geneva, "[m]any and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley," Mary's husband, to which she was, indicatively, "a devout but nearly silent listener" (my emphasis 4). The silencing that Shelley was subjected to in the company of her male poets acquire even greater importance, as I will illustrate subsequently, in the way Shelley handles the issue of alterity in her novel.
His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (F 56)

Immediately, both Frankenstein and the reader find themselves confined in an enclosed space where "the pursuit of knowledge" (F 54) reaches and exceeds the limits of life and death, to confront the arresting physicality of the creature as an ugly monster, whose "horrid" hideousness contrasts with the seemingly uniform characteristics/bodily parts Frankenstein had selected.24

Infamous dead body parts taken out of criminal bodies surely situate Frankenstein as a scientist within the general practice of anatomists who equipped themselves out of the "dissecting room," the "slaughterhouse" (F 53) or even the graveyards as the 1931 Frankenstein movie by James Whales also dramatizes in black and white font at the moment Frankenstein and his assistant break into the cemetery to steal a corpse; but while Whale's movie gives the book another direction by distinctly associating the criminal mind with the murderous body/disposition, Shelley's Frankenstein introduces monstrosity by gradually fixating the pervasive infamy that follows the darkest recesses of the medical profession. Despite the enthusiasm, Frankenstein feels disgusted even at the moment he gathers the material for the animation of the corpse: as he says, "often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion" (F 53). In his Gothick Origins and Innovations (1994), Tim Marshall addresses precisely this connection between Frankenstein and the anatomy practices of the time (57-64); especially by the 1820s, Marshall contends,

24 In the novel, Victor describes how he "had selected his [the monster's] features as beautiful," but the result was one of "breathless horror and disgust" (F 56).
the act of body-snatching flourished and joined the act of dissecting criminal corpses to bring infamy to the profession, a "profane," "illicit," and "unclean" state which medical men wanted to shed (57). In Marshall's account, the monstrous creature does more than reflect the taintedness of the medical profession; it also embodies "political satire" in enacting this doubling that constitutes Victor an accomplice/perpetrator in the particular murders. But how is this relevant to questions of the body politic in the novel? Marshall's interpretation is useful on the basis of the political inflections of the monstrous body as an assembly of disparate bodies. Yet again, the concept of the doppelgänger testifies to what truly gives birth to the monstrous body of Frankenstein's creation, and the subsequent acts of violence towards the national family: namely, the body politic itself as parent. After the murder of his little brother William, Frankenstein refers to the creature as "my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me" (F 74).

Again, the starting point of this identification is the anatomized corpse put together and brought to life, both in its political embodiment and in its eighteenth-century status as a source of knowledge. Referring to the practice of pathological anatomy developed during that time, for instance, René Laënnec (1781-1826), as a French physician and the inventor of the stethoscope in 1819, argues that the "opening up of corpses is the means of acquiring . . . knowledge" (qtd. in Foucault's The Birth of a Clinic 167), particularly knowledge about the course of disease throughout the organs of the human body. In a similar manner, Foucault links a transformation like this in his "The Body of the Condemned" of his Discipline and Punish (1975) to the concept of the body politic at large: "One would be concerned with the 'body politic,'" he says, "as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest . . .

25 Marshall mentions the "Burke-and-Hare scandal," raised after Burke and Hare killed sixteen people in 1828 to sell corpses to Dr. Robert Knox (59). As a machine that assembles corpses, Frankenstein's creature, Marshall says, "is striking at social hypocrisy" (60). After the passage of the Anatomy Act (1832), Marshall continues, the bodies of the poor supplied the medical profession, thus creating a "politics of 'two nations,' rich and poor" (63).
human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge" (28). What is stressed here is the importance to the body politic of the status of the human body as a source of knowledge. A source of scientific enquiry, regulation, and political representation, the body (like the monstrous body of Frankenstein's creature) is central for the understanding of the post-revolutionary context in the nineteenth-century English nation. Similarly, De Baecque is right when he claims that representations "that border the tale of the Revolution" should "be seen or conceived as ways of knowing, interpreting, and thinking about the history of the revolutionary event, exactly as the body, at the end of the eighteenth century, was at once a form of political representation and a scientific scale of knowledge" (7).

For example, one way in which Shelley uses the body as political trope to understand the political situation of her times is by commenting implicitly on the French Revolution, the ensuing hopes and fears, as well as the subsequent Francophobia it triggered. Not only does the textual/visual during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries abound with bodily representations that answer to the main political events of the period, but it also embraces similarly attuned Gothic artistry. Among many are Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1782) (Fig. 2), whose use of the monstrous and the dead body fuelled subsequent representations of the French Revolution, and William Blake's, whose *The House of Death* (c. 1790) (Fig. 3) also relies on a similar imagery of the dead body. The art of famous satirist James Gillray is also included, whose works became notorious for their scathing satire; apart from *The Contrast*, mentioned in the introduction and figuring in the form of female bodies the two conflicting views on the French Revolution, one does not fail to comment on Gillray's *King*.

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26 Both Fuseli's and Blake's art were part of the 2006 Tate Britain Exhibition's *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination*, together with artists like George Romney, James Barry, Maria Cosway, John Flaxman, Theodore Von Holst, and James Gillray. The exhibition was preoccupied with the Gothic and general portrayals of the fantastical in the context of the period between 1770 and 1830.

27 Blake creates the watercolour print in response to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), and recounts the confrontation of the human with death and disease. The human body figures prominently in his representations.

28 For more information, see the 2001 Tate Britain Exhibition titled "James Gillray: The Art of Caricature" online.
George III ('The French Invasion; or John Bull, Bombarding the Bum-Boats') (1793) (Fig.4), in which Gillray depicts the body of George III as the body of England that protects itself in a rather grotesque way against the French. Far from having peripheral significance, the sketches form part of an extended tradition that use the body in political commentary, not only because the body puts an idea on the map and makes it even more visible, but also because the body itself is central as a source of knowledge. Victor's laboratory in Frankenstein turns into exactly this accommodating space in which the body arises as a source of empirical enquiry and transcendental thinking.

As an aspiring scientist, then, Frankenstein attempts to break the boundaries between "Life and death" (F 52) by concentrating his scientific energies on the creature's body. In the form of the creature that Frankenstein brings forth, though, "meaning itself runs riot" (Halberstam 2), since rules, laws and boundaries are irrevocably disturbed, and the fundamentals of the organic wholeness and harmony of the human/political body break down into pieces. It is exactly within the spaces created between living and dying that the encounter of the normative and the monstrous body takes place; more than that, the encounter between the living and the dead, according to Amy Gates, allows that Mary Shelley "adopts and adapts their remains to fabricate a new future" (137). What this new future entails is not, apparently, the re-usefulness of the corpse once it is buried and "reenters," as Thomas Lacqueur contends, "the great natural cycle of life and death" as organic fuel (3), but the corpse's re-enchantment for the living; indeed, the dead body is seen by the living as "powerful, dangerous, preserved, revered, feared, an object of ritual, a thing to be reckoned with. For the living, for at least some time, it is always more than it is" (4). Lacqueur explicitly claims that the dead bodies define generations, demarcate the sacred and the profane and more ordinary spaces as well, are the guarantors of land and power and authority, mirror the
living to themselves, and insist on our temporal limits. The dead are
witnesses to mortality. They hear us and we speak to them even if we know
that they, like all base matter, are deaf and dumb. Bones address us from the
gibbet. (4)

Thus, the dead bodies signify, and constitute a powerful source of authority visible not only
in Burke's Reflections in his evocation of the impenetrable authority of the past and England's
ancestors,29 but also, in quite complex and conflicting ways, in Shelley's Frankenstein during
the encounter of the dead with the living. As will be discussed in the next chapter, The Last
Man too brings out a certain "utility" of the dead, but this is in remembering and containing
the dead to imagine a national community. In Frankenstein's case, the monster treads at these
points where life and death become infused in each other. Exposing the limits and the inner
cracks of nationhood, Frankenstein's creature and his impossible bride embody perceptible
threats to the fictional uniformity of English domesticity on many levels. When the living and
the dead meet, the bodies are shaken to their core. The body of the monster "is a filthy type of
yours" (F 126), as the creature says to Frankenstein, and the process of meaning making
starts from their first encounter. Inevitably, Frankenstein's actions lead the creature to "bend
[his] mind towards injury and death" (F 134).

When it comes to the outcome of Frankenstein's endeavors in his laboratory, the
creation deviates considerably from the physical aspect that "belongs to humanity" (73),
according to the ambitious scientist; instead, the creature is instantly perceived as a "wretch,"
a "filthy demon" (F 73) and an "[a]bhorred monster" (F 96) that automatically belongs to the
category of the inhuman. The dichotomy between self and other (and this othering comes to
mean very specific things with regards to Frankenstein's national narratives) is immediately

29 Paine attacked the notion of "governing beyond the grave" (164) as a tyranny in his Rights of Man: "It is the
living, and not the dead, that are to be accommodated. When man ceases to be, his power and his wants cease
with him; and having no longer any participation in the concerns of this world, he has no longer any authority in
directing who shall be its governors, or how its government shall be organized, or how administered" (164).
formed and sustained by the physical difference between the "normal" and the "abnormal," in much the same way that, as Andrew Smith and William Hughes claim in their discussion of Gothic and postcolonialism, the new Enlightenment humanism relies on a "conceptualization of humanity . . . in relation to the seemingly non-human" (1). The Gothic, as it seems, enters Shelley's *Frankenstein* to offer a space in which "key elements of the dominant culture become debated, affirmed and questioned" (3). Indeed, *Frankenstein* joins a large array of texts like William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Robert Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) that explicitly or implicitly employ the Gothic to talk about such dichotomies. In a similar way, Anne Radcliffe also employs the politically-charged Gothic trope in her novel *The Italian* (1797), whose Italian setting helps shield and promote at the same time Radcliffe's commentary on 1790s Britain. In *Frankenstein*, Victor claims to "protect" his familial enclave from the monster, thus enacting both the monster's and Victor's clashing narratives: "Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall" (F 97). The word "community" that Victor uses does more than indicate a certain point of communication; it effectively introduces the concept of "community" whose direct relevance to the national community invites questions as to what constitutes it, and what threatens it. Of course, it is from "community" itself that Victor strays, and nurtures monsters. But it is crucial that the concept of domesticity and home-preserving seem to need for Shelley a radical redefinition, namely what Anne Mellor calls "a revolutionary redefinition of the way nations are governed" (211).

But before delving more deeply into Shelley's political commentary regarding the body politic, it is crucial to presently focus on the monster trope as a corporeal political metaphor. Pivotal in the creature's narrative is exactly the moment when it mounts a critique against the socio-political injustices that form its alterity:
I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these advantages; but, without either, he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few! And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome. I was not even of the same nature as man. (F 116-7)

In this passage what the reader perceives is the way the Gothic foregrounds what Halberstam calls "a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known" (2). At the heart of the monster's realisation, and as the locus of the very otherness of which it is aware, lies its own, "hideously deformed and loathsome" (F 116-7) body. The story goes back to Mary Shelley's long-established lineage and heritage that include a variety of cultural and literary influences in which the monstrous as a trope abounds. Both Sterrenburg and Baldick refer to the way Shelley absorbs the political debates of her parents' times; and while Baldick makes a quick reference to the discourse around the body politic – he mentions the way the body politic turns "not just diseased, but misshapen, abortive, monstrous" in lieu of "political discord and rebellion" (14), – he misses, in the long run, to stress the fact that it is the bodily that is monstrous. Similarly, though Sterrenburg also addresses the monster as metaphor during, and, after (albeit in a more internalized form) the Revolution (153), he does not lay enough emphasis on the fact that the monstrous body is essentially a text; and "[T]exts," Halberstam says, "like bodies, store up memories of past fears, of distant traumas" (19).
The monster, in this context, helps bring out the trauma of English nationhood. What constitutes English nationhood is going to help bring out what is, in fact, "threatened" and "threatening" for the welfare of the body politic; according to Linda Colley, "Great Britain . . . was heavily dependent for its raison d'être on a broadly Protestant culture, on the threat and tonic of recurrent war, especially war with France, and on the triumphs, profits and Otherness represented by a massive overseas empire" (327). Among these, this kind of fear for "recurrent war," as well as earlier, conflicting responses to the mentality of the French Revolution, are important factors that fuel the discourse of monstrosity developed during the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft evokes Burke's deviance from the dictates of reason in his *Reflections*, refers to "the demon of property" (16) in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) as devouring "the sacred rights of men" (160), and labels man "an artificial monster" rendered abnormal by the doctrines of "hereditary property" (161). Similarly, Paine clearly equates in his *Rights of Man* (1791) years of depraving monarchical government with a disease infecting the body politic, "too deeply rooted to be removed . . . too abominably filthy to be cleansed, by any thing short of a complete and universal revolution" (165). Sterrenburg evokes similar narratives that appropriate the metaphor and, in their turn, "depict the revolutionary crowd as demons and monsters" (153), but, more importantly, he suggests that "Frankenstein's Monster" itself "rises from the body of writings on the French Revolution" (152). Newspapers and other print texts like the *Anti-Jacobin* fiercely utilize the monstrous body and other tropes to attack

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30 Conversely, George Walker's *The Vagabond* (1799) as an Anti-Jacobin novel mounts a powerful critique on radical philosophers like William Godwin. In the novel, Frederick as a converted radical calls monarchy "a disease in the body of society" (55).

31 For a more comprehensive account of the use of the monster trope during the Revolutionary Controversy of the 1790s see Chris Baldick's "The Politics of Monstrosity" in *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-century Writing* (1987).
radicals and Jacobin novels that emerge during the 1790s like William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794). Burke, in his turn, not only attacks radicals like Godwin for their wicked influence, but also likens France in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796-7) as the centre of revolutionary energy with a "cannibal republlick" (97). The way this kind of bodily, national otherness extends to immediately embrace the feminine will be discussed in connection to a possible union between a male and a female monster, and the politics of exclusion such a union effects.

Thus, monstrosity, alterity, and the body seem internally interwoven with each other, and have been at least from the early modern period. Mostly since the seventeenth century, Stephen Bann argues, there has been a fascination with new creations that catches the attention especially of those who are "creators of monsters" (3) themselves; Bann mentions "the Dutch silversmith Arent van Bolten," who used to construct intricate drawings and bronzes, the latter of which included collections of animal hybrids (combinations of different bodies of animals), all evidence "to the new, inquisitive scrutiny of the world" (3-4).

Whereas, however, Bann mentions John Ruskin's "True and False Griffins" (1856) (Fig. 5) as going beyond a "mere representational effect" to contrast imaginative recreation of wholeness with mere "addition of parts," and prove the crucial role of art in illustrating the way the world is perceived (5-6), he also refers to Charles Waterton's *John Bull and the National Debt* (1807) (Fig. 6) as a more politically charged utilization of monstrosity. Indeed, the way the bodies of the porcupine, the human, and the tortoise shell are stitched together in the creation mounts a pretty physical satire on the heavily-debted state of England during the early 1800s. In a way, the trope of monstrosity introducing itself well into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries aimed at expressing the conflicted state of a national body that

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32 Apart from the textual vitriolic attacks on the radicals, anti-jacobin propaganda also employs satirical sketches like "The Nightmare" of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* (1799) that demonize/monsterize the French Revolution in ways that bring to the forefront the deviant, malformed body.
strenuously attempted to define itself, to "grow into itself" (56) to use Ross's words, by constructing a notion of the superior, religious motherly national body\(^{33}\) (carefully defined by the male, bourgeois subject) opposed to the others. After all, the attempt to differentiate the national self from the national other was greatly based on "a scientific gloss," as H. L. Malchow suggests, that reinforced the "Eurocentric" (63) view of cultural and national superiority distinctly informing English mentality, and that substantially relied on the physical differentiation of the other from the self.\(^{34}\) Frankenstein's monster, the embodiment of otherness in the novel, targets directly the national imaginary as home, and brings with it the nation's worst nightmare, namely the possibility of "a race of devils" (127).

1.3. Female Monsters, Hideous Progenies, and the Ethics of Domesticity

This idea of a race of devils not only foregrounds the idea that the English are a separate race in need of protection from its monstrous race-double, but also combines the national and the imperial in a relationship that defines the English nation, and targets its others. But most of all, the self-other relationship has to be examined in connection to the concept of the family, made possible by the female presence in the novel. The existence of the female monster (that would make a race of devils possible), both within Frankenstein's narrative and in connection to the present discussion, is paramount, in this case, as a symbol for the other. One is invited to imagine the trail of meanings a doubly-signifying body like the female monster's carries. First of all, it is part of the text's preoccupation with potential mothering of families/nations. This is why the analysis of the way the body politic implicates

\(^{33}\) Interestingly, Frazer's Magazine argues in 1830 that "A State without religion is like a human body without a soul, or rather like a human body of the species of the Frankenstein Monster, without a pure and vivifying principle" (qtd. in Sterrenburg 166). Even from the first stages of Frankenstein's publication, the monster was associated with revolutionary allegiances.

\(^{34}\) Malchow mentions the example of the "Hottentot Venus" displayed in London in the early 1800s, whose dead body was transformed into a text/testament to the constructed inferiority of the other.
itself in questions of selfhood and otherness is necessary if only relevant to a revised cult of
domicity whereby the figure of the mother is paramount, and the concept of the nurtured family extends to the concept of the body politic proper; as Mellor indicates: "only a culture that mothers all its members, a behaviour traditionally embodied in but not necessarily limited to the work of women, can prevent the making of monsters capable of destroying us all" (216). The figure of the mother is, indeed, closely connected to ideas of domesticity and the role of women both in the private and in the public realm, since the idea of "[t]he family trope," as Anne McClintock clarifies, is dependent on a carefully constructed gender differentiation, "powerful constructions of gender" that join to render feasible a "national family of man" (63). What this means for Shelley's *Frankenstein* is that Frankenstein's status as "a Genevese" whose family "is one of the most distinguished of that republic" (*F* 26), and "whose ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics," well respected and honoured by the community, extends to the symbolic status of his familial unity as part of "the national identity so important to his sense of self" (142), as Denise Gigante argues, and the systematic exclusion of women from the community. Before studying this kind of exclusion, however, man's national identity, family, and self need to be addressed in connection to the "anti-English."

*As Frankenstein* progresses, the prospect of a female monster comes to doubly advance Frankenstein's reaction to fear and horror. That the creature requests, or, rather, demands for "a creature of another sex" (*F* 141) makes Frankenstein shudder at the thought of "the possible consequences of my consent" (*F* 141). The other body breaks in, and it is brought to life out of the dysfunctional, fragmented disposition of the "egalitarian bourgeois family" (Mellor 215) that Frankenstein distorts and disengages from his enterprise. The repressed, therefore, bursts out – albeit as what Foucault perceives as a cultural construction (Halberstam 8) – and all the cracks in the supposedly proportionate face of English society
materialize in front of Frankenstein's eyes. In inexorable comparison, the monstrous body, "frightening or ugly, abnormal or disgusting," unravels "the difference between an other and a self, a pervert and a normal person, a foreigner and a native" (Halberstam 8): what seems pertinent to my argument is that Frankenstein's monster reveals itself "as the antithesis of 'Englishness'" (Halberstam 14). The monster, in Frankenstein's eyes, is unleashed unto the world as the same "Domestic carnage" (ll. 300) that Wordsworth saw in the Tenth Book of his Prelude filling the streets of Paris between 1792 and 1794 during the Reign of Terror. Having visited the city where "The Dead upon the Dying heaped" (ll. 57), Wordsworth reminisces the battle between the French and the English in 1793 that culminated with the defeat of the English, "When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown/ Left without glory on the field" (ll. 286-7). This same feeling of patriotism whereby Wordsworth anxiously anticipates the fate of his own country is developed within the general framework of English patriotism that perceives the French as the other that threatens the English stability. The prospect of "a race of devils" (F 160) ushers precisely this xenophobia that also accompanies the workings of the British Empire.

To properly contextualise this statement, one needs to remember what was claimed earlier about the way "by the 1830s . . . a new understanding of national identity had emerged in Britain, which," most indicatively, "was the product of the consolidation of a properly imperial culture" (Makdisi 62). Indeed, apart from the internal union of England and Scotland in 1707 that constituted the first steps towards Britain "as a political unit" (Makdisi 63), the sweep of discourses about the Orient came gradually with the coming of the Empire, and Oriental texts like Beckford's Vathek actively engaged the reader in "knowledge of and power over the Orient" (Makdisi 65), through discourses that at the same time claimed Britain's superiority. For Edward Said, therefore, as he claims in his Orientalism (1978), Orientalism is a body of representations. It is sustained through hegemony, and this, according to Said, is
what gives force and durability to it (134). This exercise of hegemonical power over the other is subtly but palpably detectable even from the moment Frankenstein announces his desire to be a "father" to a "new species" that "would bless me as its creator and source" (F 52). Apart from Victor's plan, *Frankenstein* 's national narratives contain strong encounters with the East, especially through the character of Safie, Felix's Arabian beloved introduced to the DeLacey family at the moment the creature becomes its silent observer. In such a case, what is important is both that the DeLacey family comes in sharp contrast to Victor's scattered family by embodying, according to Mellor, Shelley's "ideal of the egalitarian family" (49), but they also compose a space where the native and the Oriental meet. The learning of the native language by Safie (91), and the monster's attempt to learn the language through Safie's lessons is one of the many subtle yet present examples of British domination over the Orient. Among these are also the book by which Felix tries to teach Safie (Volney's *Ruins of Empires*) and the societal systems Felix explains to Safie, the injustices that followed Safie's father and his subsequent condemnation due to "his religion and wealth" (F 119), as well as the story of Safie's mother (who was a Christian, not accidentally), who was resistant to the bonds of the Mahometan practices. All these examples betray a certain preconception of the Eastern, at the same time when the cultural and intellectual superiority of the native is testified. As Makdisi says, especially from the beginning of the 1800s, English and English assimilation would be the priority (70-1). The English body politic needs to be uniform, and the Empire needs to be seen as a uniform body as well, the "gigantic body of the empire" (Anderson 86).

Further than that, part of the effort to acquire a united English nation is the allegiance to the Christian religion, and Protestantism in particular. In this case, the importance of English Protestantism in holding together a certain image of the national family shows greatly if one takes a careful look into the story of Safie's mother. Being "a Christian Arab"
(F 120), as opposed to Safie's Mahometan father, Safie's mother is able to teach "her to aspire
to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers
of Mahomet. This lady died; but her lessons were indelibly impressed on the mind of Safie"
(F 120). Britain's cultural and religious superiority is once more affirmed, and Safie escapes
in the haven provided by the DeLacey family and the doctrines they uphold. Apart from
Safie's parental history, however, one more example of how the Christian (Protestant)
religion is implemented within the structures of the conventional English national family lies
in Victor's statement that he is a Genevese,35 and that his "family is one of the most
distinguished of that republic" (F 31); as Vincent contends, this inevitably means "a
Protestant sense of duty" that nevertheless misguides Victor "to create his creature" (653).

Here is one of the many instances Frankenstein's national narratives break loose and co-
develop with their monstrous doubles: the mistaken sense of duty that drives Victor to say
that he wants to "banish disease" and "render man invulnerable" (F 40), nurtures the monster
as embodiment of everything that endangers the discourse of the unified national self. The
monster is shunned as a "[d]evil" (F 96), and a potential father to a race of devils that disrupt
the nation's religious discourse, as well as the discourse of "normal" nationhood that Victor
constructs as a male bourgeois36 subject.

The reason I refer to gendered ideas of English nationhood is Victor's quite conscious
effort to promote his own, male definition of the gendered nation. And, of course, while
Halberstam finds Mellor's contention that Victor is striving for a society without women
through a homoerotic attachment to his monster a little misleading with regard to a more
subtle function of patriarchy in the novel (42), I agree with Mellor with respect to Victor's
conscious differentiation of himself from the female other; indeed, I believe that the co-

35 Geneva functions as more like a symbolic place that actually represents the English Protestant nation.
36 Victor indicatively refers to his ancestors as having "been for many years counsellors and syndics," and his
father's respectable position in "several public situations" (F 31).
existence of Victor and the creature creates a dynamics of compulsion/revulsion through which the one is defined through the other, and the self is also repulsed by the other, whether this othering refers to national others, racial others/religious others, or female others. In all these instances, cracks are created in the uniform face of English nationhood, and the concept of the home becomes contested. Mellor is right when she argues that Shelley herself upheld "calm and domestic harmony" (27) in her life, and this idea of domestic harmony surely extends to her idea of proper English nationhood. Her *History of a Six Week's Tour* (1817) attests to Shelley's preconceived ideas about a somewhat uniform English character, and is also replete with diminishing comments about national others (25); all these definitely fit to the discourse of the times, and affect Shelley's narrative. But the image of the family itself that Shelley issues in *Frankenstein* point to her idea of how an unhealthy family unit is, and what a new, improved version of a gendered family based on equality and balance actually means. Indeed, as Mellor comments, Shelley introduces "a new element, an egalitarian definition of gender-roles within the bourgeois family" (44), and she does so through the clashing narratives of "normal" and "abnormal" familial bodies.

In reality, Victor's "normal" "family skin" is fissured" (Gigante 142); *Frankenstein's* women are not only "conspicuously absent from the main action" (69), as Stephen Behrendt notices, but they are also, and, most importantly, passive, silent participants in male constructions of the family/national dynamic. Walton's sister Margaret is only there as a listener, Frankenstein's mother dies due to an illness (*F* 42-3), and Elizabeth, Victor's cousin, remains a symbolic body, caregiver and upholder of "a happy, cheerful home" (*F* 50), that symbolically exists through "the prospect" (*F* 42) of a union with Frankenstein. Other than that, and especially after the drift of Frankenstein away from his other social bonds – "I

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37 Adam Roberts discusses Felicia Hemans's *Records of Woman* (1828) as a response to the "'cult of true womanhood'," and the role of woman as "the icon of female domesticity" "away from the public" (313).
shunned my fellow-creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime" (F 55) – Elizabeth's body cannot function as the family/home breaks down, and her corpse comes to the surface:

Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed. (F 57)

Frankenstein's dream acquires a tangibility that acts out the dead female corpse for the first time, and, as it seems, introduces the gothic mode as an affect to "the body itself, its glands, muscles, epidermis, and circulatory system, quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physiological reactions to fear" (Moers 77). Getting to Frankenstein this way, this "physiological" (Moers 77) reaction follows a tradition that targets the reader and that is also provoked by works like Anne Radcliffe's pivotal *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), as Moers comments.

The symbolic moment that brings together this clash of bodies is the moment when Frankenstein tears apart the female monster and throws away her remains. This happens only after the creature learns the imperative need for companionship, a need that Frankenstein himself spurs in the course of the narrative: "It is true we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel" (F 141). From that moment onwards, though Frankenstein employs himself in granting his creature's desire, he is abruptly possessed by the feeling of fear and indictment at the result of his labors, and madly tears apart the half-finished female creature:
As I looked on him, his countenance expressed the utmost extent of malice and treachery. I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew. (F 161)

That the female creature will, in fact, prove to be malign is entirely Frankenstein's conclusion, and the tearing apart of the female body signifies more than just Victor's inherent fear of a race of monsters inhabiting the earth; it signifies a double push into the "realm of monstrosity" (117) as Katherine Kearns calls it. As Kearns explains, the narrative of a doubly-monstrous creature that combines the woman and the monster is too heavy to be realised, even allowed to exist within Frankenstein's narrative: "A doubled monstrosity of woman and monster would cancel itself out as too egregious, so far-fetched as to obviate the symbolic potential of the story altogether" (Kearns 120). Indeed, in constructing the female monster there is not even a little of this spark of enthusiasm that accompanied his creation of the male creature (126); more than that, Victor says that "my heart often sickened at the work of my hands" (126) in attempting to create a creature that "might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate" (126).

The act of brutally destroying the half-finished female creature is important because it means both the denial of a possible familial community for the male creature, and the centrality of the female body to signify this denial. After all, woman's association with the body is well-known; Elizabeth V. Spelman, for instance, traces this connection between women and the body from the writings of philosophers like Plato in her illuminating "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views" (Feminist Theory and the Body, 1999), and

38 Gary Kelly informs that in her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), Wollstonecraft answers "the Western philosophical tradition's relegation of 'woman' to the sphere of matter, body, and the passions" (26).
deduces that, according to Plato, "the body is seen as the source of all the undesirable traits a human being could have, and women's lives are spent manifesting those traits" (39). This destructiveness of the female body, in particular, resonates in Frankenstein's repulsiveness towards even the possibility of creating a female monster. "[T]he scene of [Victor's] odious work" (F 164) thus turns into a nightmarish vision actualized by the stress on the mangled flesh. According to Susan Bordo, a feminist critic who offers a corrective to Judith Butler's postmodern denial of the material corpus, one should definitely "be reminded of the materiality of the body" (92), because it is through this materiality that meaning can be issued. The status of the female creature as all body remains especially from the moment what was left of her "lay scattered on the floor" (F 165), and, despite Frankenstein's contention that he "almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being" (F 165), the female creature remains half-made up. Already, in this instance, the fact that Frankenstein offers, as Jonathan Sawday argues, "a critique of the implications of the Cartesian divide" (146) between body and soul automatically differentiates between the self's association with the superiority of the soul, and the body's association with "division" (146): in this context, the creature, and the possibility of its union with its female counterpart, blur the boundaries between body and soul, life and death, self and other, since its fragmentary nature becomes a mirror of the body politic, and more so because of the palpable absence of its female partner.

Following this, what Frankenstein seems to fear most is the female monster as a reproductive machine, a "potential to reappropriate the role of reproduction" (232), to use Alan Rauch's phrase, that would breed a nation of monsters. The notion of a monstrous family is important not only because of Burke's idea that "We begin our public affections in our families" (Reflections 226), but also because of the nation's contradictions it reveals. Mothering the family is, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, concomitant with mothering parts/citizens of the body politic. Indeed, Kelly talks about the new,
bourgeois model of the "domestic woman" (28) that both Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft, each in their own way, saw as fundamental in the socio-cultural milieu of the nation. In more detail, Kelly quotes More's comment on the need for "a patriotism at once firm and feminine for the general good" (29). Mary Shelley, too, foregrounds the importance of women in public culture by underlining the dysfunction of a family lacking a mother. Frankenstein's mother dies, and the DeLaceys lack a mother as well (F 109). In a similar manner, Elizabeth is excluded from an active participation in a possible egalitarian family. But more than these, Frankenstein's creature is born "unmothered" (Mellor 47): Mellor is correct when she retorts that "[w]hen the nuclear family fails to mother its offspring, it engenders homicidal monsters" (47). The conclusion, Mellor highlights, is Shelley's attack on patriarchy and its evils; "the separation from the public realm of feminine affections and compassion" has bred monsters (Mellor 117). It is the model of a nearly perfect egalitarian family as embodied by the DeLaceys that brought the monster's need for human compassion and companion. More explicitly, it is the "gentle manners and beauty of the cottagers" (F 109) that create feelings of sympathy and affection within the monster, qualities indispensable for the smooth functioning of a healthy body politic. These are the same bonds of sympathy and affection that would sustain the notion of an imaginary body politic in The Last Man, and that Percy Shelley takes a step further in his essay On Love (1818) to talk about the bonds created by affections that allude to patriotism:

There is eloquence in the tongueless wind and a melody in the flowing of 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

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39 The autobiographical overtones refer to Shelley's own experience of losing her mother on "September 10, 1797," out of "puerperal fever" (Mellor 1), as well as her general fear "of parental abandonment" created out of her relationship with her father (Mellor 46).
eyes like the enthusiasm of patriotic success or the voice of one beloved
singing to you alone. (170)

The emotional bonds that patriotism, and, to that extent, the love of one's beloved/family
generates is something that Frankenstein renounces at the moment of his familial
abandonment, and his subsequent denial to create a female mate for his male, monstrous
offspring. What Percy Shelley sees as "discovery" of the "antitype" (505) in love and
affection goes awry in *Frankenstein*: the antitype turns into an abortive body.

The moment that the two familial bodies finally clash and explode is the moment
when the female creature is destroyed – and so is the creature's possibility for affection and
companionship – together with the final threat to Frankenstein: "I will be with you on your
wedding-night" (F 163). The creature fires the threat at the same time as Frankenstein
intrudes upon the creature's future body politic. The procession of dead corpses that the
creature causes is followed by Clerval's corpse (F 169), and culminates in Elizabeth's dead
body on her wedding night: "She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her
head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half-covered by her hair. Everywhere
I turn I see the same figure – her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its
bridal bier" (F 189). Elizabeth's body speaks, and tells the story of the monster's intrusion.
The clash of bodies is complete, and they each create narratives of law and lawlessness. The
lawful body, precisely through its seeming impenetrability, "is always peculiarly open to
being re-coloured by precisely those forces which it seeks to suppress, and its discourse,
while it strains toward clarity, must also undergo the opposite process, which is continual
obfuscation" (Gothic Pathologies 44), as Punter artfully claims. The monster's body is what
Punter calls "the exceptional body" (45), which the law tries to shun, but which is
nevertheless revealed through the Gothic uncanny (45), a moment when the familiar and the
unfamiliar break down. Truly, Botting makes it clear that the uncanny "disturbs the familiar,
homely and secure sense of reality and normality" (7). It is during these moments that the suppressed trauma of a fragmentary English nationhood comes to the surface, and replicates itself in the form of the monstrous body as a political metaphor. Imagining the nation fosters the monster, and this monster "enters through the back door, and sits beside you in the parlor" (Halberstam 15), refusing to be silenced anymore.
Chapter 2

Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*: Narrative, Nationhood, and the Body Politic

2.1. The Socio-political Context

    Look closely at the letters. Can you see, entering (stage right), then floating full,
    then heading off – so soon –
    how like a little kohl-rimmed moon
    *o* plots her course from *b* to *d*
    – as *y*, unanswered, knocks at the stage door?
    Looked at too long, words fail,
    phase out. Ask, now that *body* shines
    no longer, by what light you learn these lines
    and what the *b* and *d* stood for.
    James Merrill, "*b o d y*" (240)

The lethal atmosphere that renders Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* notorious as a pessimistic, post-apocalyptic narrative is exactly the midpoint from which she unravels her political commentary on questions of nationhood, the empire, and the body politic. In this context, *The Last Man* takes *Frankenstein*'s political agenda a step further in not just exposing the contradictions that condition England's body politic, but also in approaching the concept and viability of nationhood itself in the decades following the great events of the early 1800s. It is not random either that critics like Lee Sterrenburg have called *The Last Man* Shelley's "Anatomy of Failed Revolutions" (324) or that the word "anatomy" was chosen to indicate the careful mapping of the post-revolutionary world, both national and international, as a body that speaks. The heavily-laden resonances that permeate Shelley's narrative indeed range from Burke's ideals for a national organism that breathes through the impenetrable authority of its past/ origins, to an equally contestable Shelleyan republicanism that stands inadequate in the face of practical threats. Even more indicatively, Mary Shelley negotiates the in-between spaces that stand among the "*b*" and "*d,*" according to James Merrill's 1995 poem, of nationhood and nation-making. The way "*b*" signifies birth and "*d*" death in questions of nationhood indeed matters; yet, what is it that remains beyond and in-between the birth and the death of the nation, especially considering the precariousness of even
discussing nationhood after the destructiveness of the plague in the second part of *The Last Man*? Lionel Verney, the main character of the novel, is also the narrator of Shelley's story, and the last man standing after the deadly Plague; but is the fact that the last man is, in fact, English, relevant as a comment to the status of an English nation left totally changed after the destruction? Can England's dead body be reanimated? Can it be reanimated on the basis of an unfinished, distorted tale recounted from the perspective of the last man?

In this chapter, I will outline the way the birth, status, and death of England as a nation infuse themselves in Verney's post-apocalyptic narrative. Further than that, I will approach the question of what the "o" as an intermediary space and the "y" as what lies beyond in connection to the body of England indicate. Finally, I will carefully address the question of whether Shelley herself forms her own political propositions, albeit silently and with reluctance. In so doing, I will rely on the premises created by the tense relationship between nationhood, nationalism, and the homeland, and what Punter perceives as "the full terror of trauma" (*Home and Nation* 173) that threatens to break a certain imagining of England constructed, as William Blake contends in his *Jerusalem* (1804-1820), "in our Furnaces & Looms" (4.6), even more so in the post-imperial world that Shelley sketches throughout her narrative. Largely complex though they are, the breaks and the trauma the infectious Plague imposes on a national and global scale in the world of *The Last Man* reveal a lot about the status of the nation as a body that keeps constructing itself and redefining itself, like it does in *Frankenstein*, in relation to its others. This kind of fragmentation already perceptible in *Frankenstein* as a Gothic narrative continues in *The Last Man*, but the Gothic, in this case, is employed to emphasize Shelley's total de-construction (or reconstruction, as will subsequently be argued), of nationhood itself, and its supposedly progressive imperial expansion. It is exactly this Gothic mode that lays open the tension between the whole and

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40 Betty T. Bennett talks about the kinds of "reconstruction" (n. pag.) that Shelley effects in *The Last Man* in her "Radical Imaginings: Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*" (1995). No pages included in the article.
the fragmented in relation to nationhood, and confirms that "the fantasy of a whole, undivided culture arises in order to bury the otherwise haunting memory of division, fragmentation" (Punter, *Gothic Pathologies* 181). The Gothic that underlies the narrative moves further than merely representing the ancestral tribalism that characterizes Britain's myths of origin, to host the juxtaposition between the self and the other, the "normal" and the diseased/dead. Thus, when, at the advent of the Plague, the English spirit wakes up "to its full activity," and sets "itself to resist the evil" (*The Last Man* 232), there is a simultaneously developed fear urging the English people to keep asking each other "with wonder and dismay," whether it is possible "that whole countries are laid waste, whole nations annihilated, by these disorders in nature" (*The Last Man* 233).

The word "disorder" that teems with similarly inflected words like "death" (324), "melancholy" (311), "rheums and aches" (323), and "corpse" (326) brings to mind the dichotomy/distinction Punter employs between, and among, the law as "a purified abstract whole" (2) that casts order over the body politic, and bodies especially haunted by their own contradictions (*Gothic Pathologies* 3-4). Along the same lines, the fissures deep within the ideologically sustained body of the English nation are divulged throughout *The Last Man* as effects of the "English republic" (20), a newly formed, post-revolutionary, futuristic national body that succeeds the reign of "the last of its kings, the ancient friend" of Verney's father (20). In the place of the old hand of the law, here comes a new one that equally establishes the nation as what Benedict Anderson dubs "an imagined political community" (6), first and foremost produced by the collective imagination of its citizens. Nevertheless, the substratum this imaginary identification hides entails an equally operative web of contradictions shaped by the nation's somewhat complex relationship with imperialism itself. In this light, Timothy Ruppert single-handedly acknowledges Shelley's "denunciation of empire" in *The Last Man*
but only in its relatedness to a better understanding of human communities; whether the nation collapses entirely under the direness of the Plague remains to be seen, yet what seems undeniable is the role of the empire in negotiating the constructed organicism of the national body.

More and more critics over the years delve into the political milieu of The Last Man and its post-revolutionary understanding of nationhood, but few have commented on the way the novel tackles what lies behind conceptions of nationhood by employing metaphors of the body, disease, and death. In this, Shelley's original bringing together of the physical and the political echoes the discourse developed during the Revolutionary controversy of the 1790s. Thus, the "vital parts" (Reflections 85) that Burke saw as being threatened by the discourse of the Revolution in France, and "the disease" that renders the state sick (Reflections 26), find ample expression in the way Shelley handles the plague as sickness that infects and destroys the body of England. It is a fact that critics like Siobhan Carroll and Anne McWhir elaborate on the ethics of anti-contagionism the novel confers; McWhir, in particular, delineates the way discourses of the 1800s artfully connect metaphors of disease to liberal ideas, dangerous liaisons, and diseased states. Especially under the influence of the post-Napoleonic condition, Shelley comments on the state of England as a repressive, reactionary state under the command of figures like Viscount Castlereagh and the Prince Regent, who favoured "the old absolutism" that Bennett notices characterizing the backlash ideology of the 1820s. Taking the situation a step further, food shortage, unemployment, an even more precarious state of women, "public disaffection, and incidents of bloody violence such as the

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41 Indeed, Barbara Johnson discusses the Plague as the "inverted image" of Western humanism (264).
42 It is a fact that the plague was considered, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one of the most dangerous diseases, along with cholera and the yellow fever, according to Bennett (n. pag.).
43 McWhir mentions Mary Hay's The Victim of Prejudice (1799), a feminist sketch of Mary the protagonist's coping with the patriarchal world, as one of the most suggestive examples of the rather political associations contagionism triggers. The reference in the novel to "the contagion of a distempered civilization" (32) that might influence man, as well as the treatment of the heroine as an infected person especially from the death of Mr. Raymond onwards, form part of the general discourse around morals and disease.
Peterloo Massacre” (Bennett, n. pag.) fuelled the urgency for developing a narrative with which to talk about, and contest, existing ideologies by utilizing metaphors of disease and the body. It is in this context of politically inflected contagionism that Shelley shapes her "Last Man" narrative, one in a series of "Last Man" and general end-of-the-world texts that range from Lord Byron's famous "Darkness" (1816) and Thomas Campell's "The Last Man" (1823) to other works like Tennyson's "The Dawn" (The Death of Oenone, and Other Poems, 1827) that complement a great variety of writings and paintings about the end of the empire. Interestingly, Tennyson's "The Dawn" also relies on death and embodiment to tell the end-of-empire story; the "Ghost of the Brute" (5.23) wanders, haunting the people in a world of "cannibal" feasts and "rake-ruin'd bodies" (3.13), much like the "haunting" that Punter sees as being "other" (3) than the law, speaking itself, inhabiting the space, but always remaining "athwart" (Gothic Pathologies 3).

The Last Man fits perfectly into this general, European "pessimism over the prospects of politics and empire" (Sterrenburg 326), hence the employment of the profusely-used disease metaphor to talk about the effects of the revolution (Sterrenburg 326-8). In a world where by the first decades of the nineteenth century the majority of European nations confronted Napoleon's overwhelming ambition, and where the effects of the French Revolution and Napoleon's programme triggered a series of national movements for independence in the 1820s, including the Greek war of Independence, all of which saw the devastating effects of despotism and the political decadence that followed, Shelley offers her own view of the European state in creating a destruction narrative. This kind of primal form of nationalism that emerged throughout Europe as a response to Napoleonic expansion, the "anti-Napoleonic resistance" (46) that Jennifer Heuer traces during the nineteenth century, was fueled by the reinstatement of conservatism, the 1815 Congress of Vienna that imposed "order" in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars, and the persistent national movements against
the despotism that prevailed. The Greek war of Independence is one example that finds resonance in *The Last Man*; it also reflects Shelley's disillusionment by the state in Greece and abroad during the 1820s. This "collapse of revolutionary hopes in the years after 1815" (Sterrenburg 327), with the fall of Napoleon and the latter encounter with the restoration of despotism also teams with the destructive practices of empire Shelley perceives as threatening and devastating. As I will try to prove throughout the chapter, the Plague enters Shelley's narrative as "the agent of radical change" (585), to use Young-ok An's phrase, and renders "national and imperial ideologies" obsolete in the face of the Plague as a "common enemy" (587). Although the handling of racial ideologies in Shelley's novel is far more complex than this, it is important to note that by the first decades of the 1800s, apart from the desolating effects of Napoleon's imperial ambition, the growth of the British empire activated, as is also evident in *Frankenstein*, a national/imperial ideology that was based on the notion of difference between the British and the imperial other; Fisch notices the binaries resurfacing in *The Last Man* "between East and West" (272-3), as well as Lionel's apparent "Eurocentrism" (271) which will be further analyzed later in the chapter. Obviously, then, the self-other division that one perceives throughout *Frankenstein* re-appears in *The Last Man* to be similarly de-constructed, but in the context of the general reconfiguration that Shelley employs to evaluate the ideologies of her times, and to examine to what extent the British nation can even survive in such a world. Nevertheless, the self-other dichotomy that renders colonial subjects "a source of contamination" (Makdisi 70) is there in *The Last Man* to create a pervasive power dynamic hosted by the presence of the Gothic in the novel.

Indeed, as Eugenia Delamotte infers, the emergence of the Gothic novel in the British Isles from the 1760s to the mid 1800s is concomitant with the development of the concept of "race," whose discursive formation was largely based on biological factors and human divisions"(18), dichotomies that firmly hold together the differentiation between the
"healthy" and the "diseased/dead" or "monstrous" (in the case of *Frankenstein*) body politic. But whereas the "race of devils" that in *Frankenstein* constituted the threatening other enacts the collision between the body politics, the context of mobility in which *The Last Man* unfolds allows a total re-evaluation of the way such discursive constructions are there to be undone altogether, maybe to leave room for an altered conception of nationhood and community making. The Gothic appears at exactly the moment of what Botting identifies as "threats of disintegration" (3); even more emphatically, the Gothic emerges from the body (body politic in this case), brings out its innermost secrets, allows for the articulation of self and difference, hosts its death, and resurrects the ghost (of the body politic) in *The Last Man* that constantly looks for a body to haunt. The question is, does it succeed? Out of this encounter of the English with the Other, this "purely negative image of the European Self" (4) as Tabish Khair argues, that finds its ultimate expression in the Plague, ideas of a uniform, "healthy" nationhood fall apart. Is it possible, in a world of both political and personal disintegration for Mary Shelley, to reconstruct what is lost?

*The Last Man*[^44] is unique in fusing the personal and the political; it is the case that the desolate political regime Shelley witnessed upon her return from Italy in 1823 (with Percy Florence, her son) mixes with her own personal experience of grief and mourning upon the deaths of three of her children, and of her husband Percy Shelley in July 1822. One of her journal entries especially attests to the spirit of loneliness, mourning, and death with which she identifies:

> Methinks I was born to that end alone, since all events seem to lead me to that one point – & the coursers of destiny having dragged me to that single resting place, have left me . . . I cannot be destined to live long; A hatred of

[^44]: Many critics like Sterrenburg consider this novel a "roman à clef" (327), because its main characters greatly correspond to Shelley's closest friends and family; an example of this would be the correlation between Adrian and Shelley, as well as Raymond and Lord Byron.
life must consume the vital principle – perfectly detached as I am from the world, I cannot long be a part of it. I feel that all is to me dead except the necessity of viewing a succession of daily suns illuminate the sepulchre of all I love (MWSJ 432-3).

More than that, however, Shelley apparently endows her narrative with a political aspect far exceeding the pessimistic projection of her own world as a personal grave. The word "sepulchre" fits the general scheme of mourning and loss that in turn lies next to a profound politics of mourning associated with the political grave, as well as the political role of the dead body. Thus, Sigmund Freud's definition of mourning in his "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243) provides a useful direction for discussing the ambiguous co-existence/convergence of the personal and political ethics of mourning that inform The Last Man, both in terms of personal losses, and the loss of the English nation. It is under the interaction of the individual with the political that, as Amy Gates argues, Shelley stages the fruitful encounter between living and dead emphasized in the context of the places/sights in which they meet (134); more specifically, as Gates suggests, and as will be seen subsequently, "there is generative potential in the places where dust, dirt, and the living mingle, but rather than the restoration and continuation of a pre-established personal or national past arising out of and on top of decay and dirt, she envisions a new human narrative developed in conjunction with the decayed dead" (135).

Along these lines progresses Shelley's narrative in its emphasis on the importance of the rites (The Last Man 425) performed, despite the perceived danger of infection, on the bodies of their fellow citizens. The persistence of such rituals of mourning, preservation, and

45 Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin, makes a similar point about the societal role of the dead. See Godwin's Essay on Sepulchres (1809).
remembering follows a larger network of discourses on nationhood, mourning, and dying that adds to the broader body of sentimental writing, and that includes William Wordsworth's tribute in his *Essay Upon Epitaphs* (1810). Not only is Wordsworth referring to a similar need to pay tribute "to a Man as a human Being" (327) but also to something beyond mere remembering that extends to the political relevance of commemorating for the benefit of the living; "the common benefit of the living," Wordsworth writes, lies "*in close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased:* and these, it may be added, among the modern Nations of Europe are deposited within, or contiguous to their places of worship" (Wordsworth's emphasis 327). Thus, albeit what Gates sees as the actual distancing of Wordsworth, in poems like *The Excursion* (1814), from the corporeal aspect of the corpses for the sake of imaginatively recreating their usefulness (60-1) – a palpable corporeality that Lord Byron apparently endorses in his poetry – the national/communal and the dead body interact to bring forth another vision that feeds itself through the grave and the graveyard. Mary Shelley definitely places greater stress on the physical encounter of the living with the dead, and echoes in her novel what Foucault sees in his "*Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*" (1984) as the cemetery's intimate connection to "all the sites of the city, state or society," as well as the crucial role, in the nineteenth century, of the burial site of the body for conceiving death and society in general (5).

In any case, mourning and sympathy figure broadly as glue capable of preserving, or even reconstructing, the nation. As a matter of fact, sentimentalism and "the rhetorical powers of sympathy" were not only exploited, according to Esther Schor, for "building and consolidating a particular ethico-political consensus" (75), but were also used as a powerful

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46 Elegies and sonnets (see also Thomas Gray, mentioned in the introduction) written by Wordsworth and other writers, for instance, belong to this body of sentimental writing; Wordsworth's earlier "Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress" (1787) and his "On the Death of an Unfortunate Lady" (a conversational piece addressed to Alexander Pope's similar "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" (1717)) comprise a whole range of works on the subject.

47 Schor's quotations in this chapter are taken from her book *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (1995).
rhetorical device during the Revolutionary Controversy of the 1790s. More than that, the rhetoric of sympathy is coupled with a broad network of bodily metaphors that I described in the introduction as viable in referring to living organisms, alive bodies of nations, and their juxtaposition to death and disease. This is why de Baecque parallels the discourse of organizing a society with "the scientific management of the body" (6); even more relevant is de Baecque's contention that "the idea of a body is essentially pluralistic" (6) in that there is a multiplicity of bodies that interact with each other. It will be challenging to approach the way Shelley's *The Last Man* dramatizes the organicism of the English body, as well as the modifications, breaks, distortions, or reconfigurations it undergoes when in contact with other national bodies in the broader scope of infectious disease. Even more challenging will be to decipher Shelley's political agenda for preserving the national community, and to read the absence of the female body next to the male body of Verney as a last man, representative of the English nation gone awry; it is this absence that speaks louder than words.

The extent to which *The Last Man* is what Sterrenburg calls an "anti-political novel" (328), a view with which Anne K. Mellor seems to agree (*Mary Shelley* 144), remains to be challenged in the course of the chapter, but the voice Shelley adds to the long-established body of revolutionary and post-revolutionary texts seems uncontestable. The metaphors of the body that Shelley employs through the Gothic rendering of the self/other dichotomy resonates in the 1790s reaction to the French Revolution as well. Monday's issue of the *London Times* in 1792, for instance, sketches the grotesque murder of the aristocracy by narrating the story of Princess De Lamballe, who, after pleading for her life and being granted another 24 hours to live, was attacked by the mob: her "thighs were cut across, and her bowels and heart torn from her, and for two days her mangled body was dragged through

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48 An argument Sterrenburg consolidates by invoking Shelley's appropriation of metaphors of disease, also employed by her predecessors (328).

49 For more information on Mellor's approach, see her *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988), pp. 141-69.
the streets” (n. pag.). Similarly, a 1793 issue of the *London Times* recounts the moment when the Republican Frenchmen exclaims "Viva la Nation" after an execution performed by the National Assembly, and the mob tries to take hold of the dead body of the aristocrat.

Interestingly, the French in this account is associated with "poison," "deadly destructive to the peace and happiness of Mankind" (n. pag.). The political commentary that stems from these and similar other narratives is directed to a thorough delineation of the boundaries between the self and the "enemy." In a context like this, the Pestilence in *The Last Man* that threatens the national body acquires peculiar significance. In a futuristic view of the world where the contemporary emergence of nation and nationalism looms large only in order to be challenged, and where "the society and its culture," as Gellner claims, "perpetuate themselves" (29) under the "unitary idiom" that creates and invigorates nations (21), the plague presents itself as an energising trope by which to examine what happens after the birth of the republican English nation in *The Last Man*; further, the vast implications of the plague will reveal what happens after the nation's death.

2.2. Amidst an "ocean of death": England's Dead Body

The way the body of England is portrayed in Shelley's *The Last Man* is indeed different from the monstrous body politic portrayed in *Frankenstein*, where the encounter of Victor and the monster happens in the liminal spaces between life and death. In the case of *The Last Man*, England dies, and the story of dissecting its body and anatomizing it starts from its corpse. It is the corpse that tells the whole story of how it died. Also, it is the corpse of England that Shelley presents as a case for possible re-animation, in a rather reformed way. In order to address these issues, however, a brief summary of the novel is necessary.

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50 Reflecting the discourse of her times, Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft also refers to the "pestilential vapour" (15) that inflicts society in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).
Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* is, in fact, dramatized at the end of the twenty-first century, and presents itself as a body of fragmented texts, scrapped together out of the prophetic Sibyllian leaves the author found during a 1818 trip to Naples he/she visited Sibyl's Cave. The result is a tale that starts in England, at a time when England has become a republic. The first part of the narrative concerns itself with the domestic circle created by Verney, the protagonist, and his sister Perdita, both of whom are rescued from a life in poverty by Adrian, the supposed rival of Verney's father, who would also be destined to become England's king. From hence onwards, a domestic drama begins that involves Adrian's love for Evadne, a Greek princess who falls in love with Lord Raymond, a replica of Lord Byron who actually marries Verney's sister and goes to fight in the Greek war of independence. The general domestic concerns the novel dramatizes in its course are coupled with political concerns that include Raymond's imperial ambitions to conquer the East. It is at this point that the Plague strikes to eliminate these and other political clashes, and make the English both flea their country and travel around the continent in search of a safe place. As they move on, their numbers decrease, and Verney is the only one by the end of the novel standing alone and contemplating the end of the world.

The traces of "written characters" inscribed on the leaves that form the parts of this story attracted the curiosity of the author, who, from that moment onward, had "been employed in deciphering these sacred remains," the product of which is laid out before the reader's eyes as a tale prophesying the destruction of the world. Verney's narrative from the future comes alive before the reader incomplete, mediated, and scattered, like the body of Frankenstein's creature; but it is also meaningful, cautionary, prophetic, and inspired by what the author calls "the divine intuition" of "the Cumaean damsel." Evidently, *The Last Man*

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51 As Pamela Bickley asserts, "[t]he Sibylline text was translated into Italian” from Greek "in 1775 by Antolini and in that form could have attracted the attention of either or both of the Shelleys” (xxv). According to Bickley, the fragments "were first assembled as a text by a sixth-century Byzantine scholar and remained uncanonical but influential millenarian writing,” predictive of what H. W. Parke identifies as the fate of "cities and kingdoms: war, famine, pestilence or natural phenomenons,” not "private individuals” (qtd. in Bickley xxv).
is put together in the manner of a living organism that would impose, like a metaphor of the body, "a stable, continuous, unique, central presence" (de Baecque 8), at the same time that the narrative as central presence makes evident, even from the start, the fragmentariness of its nature. The "consistent form" (The Last Man 6) of the leaves' connection brings forth, in fact, the narrative of the last man,\textsuperscript{52} Lionel Verney, actualized by the process of its own narration. In this case, what is deduced from the evident fragmentariness of the text is the tale of England's "body," which, although narrated by the masculine perspective and imagined as a masculine construction, is ultimately, as will be seen, a tale of otherness and silences. Much like Wollstonecraft's Extract from a Cave of Fancy: a Tale (1792),\textsuperscript{53} the imaginative reconstruction of the narrative/body politic develops by relying on the tales of dead bodies.

England's dead body in The Last Man is surely the cadaver opened up to reveal the inner workings of nationhood and the way it is imagined by its people. Benedict Anderson's famous definition of the nation as "imagined" (6) is paramount if only because the emphasis Anderson places is not on the "falsity/genuineness" (6) of the concept of nationhood per se, because this is precisely not the point; what matters both for Anderson and for an attentive approach to The Last Man is the act of "imagining" and "creation" that fabricates ideas of nationhood (6). As a result, the picture of England as a "vast and well-manned ship" (9) that Verney alludes to at the beginning of the narrative is followed by an exposition of how England is pictured in his imagination:

In my boyish days she was the universe to me. When I stood on my native hills, and saw plain and mountain stretch out to the outmost limits of my

\textsuperscript{52} Anne McWhir similarly argues that the sibylline leaves feature as "fragments of the body of death," and form "the body of an infected text" (8). The word "infected," in this case, invokes the infectedness of ideas and ideologies.

\textsuperscript{53} In her Extract from a Cave of Fancy: a Tale (1792), Wollstonecraft narrates the story of the "hoary sage" (104) Sagestus, who, leaving "the silent vestibule of the grave" (105), encounters several bodies of dead "wrecks" lying "pendent on the craggy rocks," or "stretched lifeless on the sand" (106). Wollstonecraft's gothic story revolves around the sage's acts of reading the tales emanating from the dead bodies.
vision, speckled by the dwellings of my countrymen, and subdued to fertility by their labours, the earth's very centre was fixed for me in that spot, and the rest of her orb was as a fable, to have forgotten which would cost neither my imagination nor understanding an effort. (The Last Man 9)

Verney's apparent indifference to the existence of the rest of the globe simultaneously means his total imaginative immersion in creating an ideal picture of England as a constant visitation to his "dreams" (9). Certainly, his soon-to-be-altered indifference to the conditions of the outside world constitute part of a larger imperative that exalts England to a position far outweighing "countries of larger extent and more numerous population" (9); the persistent references to the power of England, its "valiant and wise" (59) inhabitants, and the high tribute to "our fathers" (59) that find their way into the sub-narratives of Ryland and Raymond, for example, as political contesters within the limits of the English Republic, form an idea of England as a self-constructed body sustained by its own people.

Indeed, the reference to England as a living body, a "sea-surrounded nook" (The Last Man 9) that seats itself "in the turpid sea" (9), is indispensable to a reverse conception of England as a dead body after the onset of the Plague; the portrayal of the pulselessness of "the great heart of mighty Britain" (The Last Man 261) that Verney mourns comes in sharp contrast to the earlier description of a proud, ancestral English body: "The ruins of majestic oaks which had grown, flourished, and decayed during the progress of centuries, marked where the limits of the forest once reached," and joined by a part "deserted for the younger plantations, which owed their birth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and now stood in the pride of maturity" (41). This contrast – strangely reminiscent of Blake's reference in his Jerusalem to "Englands mountains green" (ll. 2), on the one hand, and, on the other, to the cloudiness of its hills (ll. 6) – between England's beauty and its subsequent demise stages the rather abrupt course from the birth of the English nation to an untimely death. What can
safely be deduced is that Verney has formed a heavily congenial attachment to the English territory demarcated by its limits as an island and the cultural legacy hosted by its space. What remains of the English nation, however, once territory moves out of the picture? Critics of nations and nationalisms like Anthony Smith refer to "a perceived homeland" as resided by "a named community" with "a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members" (13) as emblematic for the idea of a nation. A more pressing question is, can there be a "homeland" after the English abandon their island?

The "stamp" of the "forefathers" (*Reflections* 141) that Burke envisions as characteristic of English nationhood, and their status as bearers of the heavy aristocratic and religious inheritance that Wollstonecraft so vehemently attacked, is inherently embedded into Verney's narrative even after, or rather, especially after, the only option left for the remaining English population is to abandon their island; the force with which Verney laments both their turning from England's "polluted fields and groves, and, placing the sea between us, to quit it," and their departure from "the country of our fathers, made holy by their graves" (325), attests to the imaginative recreation of a nation that relies first and foremost on the attachment of its people to its place, culture, and past, as well as a pervasive culture of mourning that penetrates and unites them. The Gothic, however, comes to shatter, or at least change to its core, the entire ideology of nationhood and nationalism that exalts England over its ominous others, including the Plague itself. The excessive compliment to the superiority of England at the beginning of *The Last Man* that also pervades texts like James Thomson's "Rule Britannia" (1763), with its idolization of the "native oak" (ll. 16) and the naval British power (ll. 5), is halted in *The Last Man* by the equally forcible realization of its own fragmentation/mortality; interestingly, sociologist Chris Shilling, in his pivotal *The Body and Social Theory* (1993), argues that not only "death is an essential feature of the human
condition" (175), but also that the body's alliance with the idea of permanent self-identity is threatened by death (175-6).

As a result, England turns "dank and cold" (323), a desert doomed to die together with its own name (324), and its own "tale of power and liberty" (324). In its status as a corpse that manifests the grim course of disease, the dead body of England speaks plenty about the functions of the body politic. Much like a clinical gaze, the critic's eye practices a kind of "[p]athological anatomy," as Foucault names it in his *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), that is first and foremost "the technique of the corpse" (141). Even before Verney and his compatriots abandon their island, their glimpses of England gradually betray a sickened physicality that provokes a strange mix of sadness/lamentation and nostalgia for its lost vigour:

> Look at England! The grass shoots up high in the meadows; but they are dank and cold, unfit bed for us. Corn we have none, and the crude fruits cannot support us . . . England, late birth-place of excellence and school of the wise, thy glory faded! Thou, England, wert the triumph of man! . . . a ragged canvas naturally, painted by man with alien colours; but the hues he gave are faded, never more to be renewed. (*The Last Man* 323)

Setting aside for a moment the ideologically-laden portrait of the glory of England by a man, a comment to be expanded on in the next part of this chapter, the image of England as the "late birth-place of excellence" and "triumph of man" exposes the inner mechanisms of English nationalism. Despite, or even better, because of, the references to the past, the former economic power, and the wise men, England emerges as a body politic made out of "the relationship between polity and culture" (35) that Gellner perceives as characteristic of modern nationhood. English culture and patriotism, the allegiance to "patriotic zeal, to the arts, to reputation" (*The Last Man* 412), in particular, present themselves in Verney's account
as the landmarks of loyalty to culture that, according to Gellner, has replaced loyalty to "a monarch or a land or a faith" (36). The land enters the picture as inextricably linked to the ancestral power of England, "the country of our fathers" (The Last Man 325) that leaves Verney lamenting for "the name of England" (326) itself once the decision to leave the land is finalized. But the tale of natural growth and continuity has abruptly ended, and the national cadaver lies there, amidst an "ocean of death" (412) as a testament to the mortality of the English nation. Gradually, Verney's hailing of England not only as a mother asked to "receive thy child" upon his return as a cultivated man, but also as "the scene of all my hopes, the mighty theatre on which is acted the only drama that can, heart and soul, bear me along with it in its development" (41), turns into a lamentation for its death.

The fate of the English nation and English nationalism is to be further addressed in the next part of the chapter, but what remains of great concern in arguments about the English nation is the metaphor of embodiment itself, and what it means to be a body as a source of knowledge. Jean-Louis-Marc Alibert (1768-1837), a French dermatologist who studied in Paris as a medical student, wrote in his Nosologie Naturelle (1817): "[w]hen philosophy brought its torch into the midst of civilized peoples, it was at last permitted to cast one’s searching gaze upon the inanimate remains of the human body, and these fragments, once the vile prey of worms, became the fruitful source of the most useful truths" (qtd. in Foucault 195).54 The turn of the dead body from a "vile prey of worms" into a "fruitful source" of knowledge exhibits the general preoccupation with the dead body as a source of empirical enquiry in the medical circles, which prevailed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and which Foucault delineates in his chapter "Open Up a Few Corpses" of his The Birth of the Clinic. In detail, Foucault claims that the medical gaze that searches for the path of disease in a dead human body came to rely less on a spatially random

54 This quote is found in Foucault's The Birth of the Clinic (1976).
dissemination of the disease throughout the body than on a concept of disease as "a set of forms and deformations, figures, and accidents and of displaced, destroyed, or modified elements bound together in sequence according to a geography that can be followed step by step" (136). Gradually, then, the pulse of England fades in its contact with the infectious disease: "we are awake now" (The Last Man 248), Verney notices as the Plague inflicts London, "the air of England is tainted" (198). Not long after, England lies "in her shroud" (326). The track of infecting the English nation spreads throughout the narrative, open to the gaze of the reader. In such a context, the dead body of Raymond as Lord Protector of England acquires a symbolic significance far exceeding the personal level; having come forth as a "leader" (50), epitome of English rank and value, amidst the continuous fraction among "aristocrats, democrats, and royalists" (49), and having assisted the Greeks in their effort to reclaim Constantinopole (in lieu of his Napoleonian, imperial purposes), Lord Raymond dies when Constantinopole falls apart (200). In the midst of Shelley's narrative, he emerges as what Young-Ok An calls "an avatar of British national and philhellenistic heroism" (601), and his dead body signals England's demise, and its subsequent infliction by the Plague.

As far as England's corpse is concerned, the word "shroud" used by Verney implies that England's dead body is a female dead body. The trope of the female dead body and the symbolic power it exerted for the Romantics is mostly evident in Lord Byron, who, "invested" as he was with "the idea of the body" more than any of his fellow poets, and "obsessed" as he was with "his appearance, weight, and representation in portraits" (8) according to Padmini Ray Murray, he had developed a "primarily somatic" (Murray 9) view of the world. Referring to the critic John O'Neill, Murray mentions O'Neill's very useful differentiation between conceiving the social body, which refers to a correspondence between

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55 Heuer explains that "Napoleon extended French territorial control over much of the European continent; at the empire's height in 1812, Napoleon and his government controlled not only France but also Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, the Italian Peninsula, much of modern-day Germany . . .,” etc (46).
"social institutions" and "bodily organs," and the more abstract body politic, which "represents models of city or country as the body writ large" (9-10); in the context of the latter, Murray examines Byron's idea of the British body politic "as a feminine entity" (66). Indeed, Byron addresses Britain, in the second Canto of his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as "The ocean queen, the free Britannia" (2.XIII), that has plundered the beautiful relics of Greece. Even more indicatively, Byron develops his own ethics of mourning\(^56\) by lamenting the dead female body of "fair Greece" (2.15), who lies in her grave, "a nation's sepulchre" (2.3), as a "sad relic of departed worth" (2.73). In the same fashion, Byron depicts Greece's body in his *The Giaour* as a female corpse in much the same manner in which he presents Leila, The Giaour's lover, as a dead body: "So coldly sweet, so deadly fair" (ll. 92), as the narrator's reference to Greece goes, "Hers is the loveliness in death" (ll. 94). Similarly, although in a quite different context, Mary Shelley features the patriarchal construction of England's body as female, caught in an ambivalent relationship to her children. Indeed, an approach to the nation as gendered will be useful as a gear in the broader engine of nationhood, nationalism, and Shelley's political prepositions in *The Last Man*.

\(^56\) Generally, according to Maria Schoina, the "decayed state of modern Greece" was also "mourned" by "Europeans who admired classical culture and art" (311).
2.3. (Dis)closing the Body Politic: The Nation and the Other

The notion of alterity/otherness that informs questions of gendering the political body are greatly proportionate to Shelley's condition as a woman writer and the way Shelley expresses, as Johnson argues, "the question of marginality" (259) in her work. The gender ideologies that penetrate the representation of England as a mother fit in the general framework of "the maternalizing of political bodies" (1), one of the objects of Julia Kipp's analysis. They also accord with the emergence of the maternal body "as a discursive construct, and motherhood as a cultural performance, an effect of systems of power that variously create and regulate the desire for maternity" (8). So, although Johnson suggests that Verney as a narrator "belongs, like the monster, to a sort of third sex" (262), the masculine language that narrates the story of England as she comes to be transformed into a female body places him in a privileged ideological position. Following this, Verney evidently points to the way he imagines England as a female when he says that "she was the universe to me," "[i]n my boyish days" (9). In the course of the novel, England is conceived as a nurturing mother dear to "thy children" (324), who separated from their mother the moment her body turned dead and cold. Even in their exile, however, the organic connection of England to her children shows in Verney's account of England's intimate relation to Adrian, Percy Shelley's literary counterpart, the son of the last king and instigator of republican ideals in the novel: in a "spirit of emigration," Verney asserts the eternal bond of the exile with his country, and maintains that, "though thousands of miles might divide him, England was still a part of him, as he of her" (325). In point of fact, Kipp indicates that many writers during the Romantic period "appealed to the mother-child bond as a means of naturalizing other forms of social interaction" (6). In a rather unique way, Shelley appropriates the mother-child relationship whereby to underline both the connotations of motherhood that inflect the English nation and English nationalism, and to address the question of what happens to the maternal dead body
politic when the children are weaned from her presence. "[F]or without her children," Verney asks, "what name could that barren island claim?" (412).

This conception of embodiment is surely based on a careful relegation of women to specific kinds of representations based on "sexual difference," to use Luce Irigaray's term: more accurately, it is the general "exploitation of women" that "is based upon sexual difference," in Irigaray's words, and that "can only be resolved through sexual difference" (21).57 which forms the ground for the set of representations the female body is subjected to. In any case, "the female body" in the nineteenth century, as Sara Richardson says, was a prevalent symbol in political prints, pamphlets, paintings, cartoons, ballads, newspapers, poetry and literature and physically on the streets, in political meetings and a campaign strategy. . . . There was a tacit acknowledgment of female political power within the home, community and in the realm. (qtd. in Murray 66)

Both the representation of the devious woman, and the representation of the pious woman, protector of the private realm,58 and nurturer of the national community in general, are grandly evident in Shelley's Frankenstein. But the image of England as mother in The Last Man has a more specific political function; the dead body of England triggers the rather different realization that the alignment of motherhood with the body politic lays open the fractures in the seemingly uniform idea of nationhood. The otherness of the maternal nation breaks in as a strong evidence that the self and the other exist within each other and create each other. The dichotomies break down at the moment when they are affirmed.

57 As a critic mostly directed to psychoanalysis, Irigaray places the construction of motherhood (moulded in terms of sexual difference) upon a male desire that is not woman's own (27). Thus, she exposes motherhood as a male creation. For more information see her illuminating book This Sex Which is Not One (1985).

58 In The Last Man, caring female characters include Idris, Verney's wife and upholder of the ethics of care, and Clara, Raymond and Perdita's daughter. Lucy Martin is yet another example, a devoted girl who conformed to an undesired marriage despite her feelings towards another man, and sacrificed herself to look after her disabled mother. Among these, there is also old Martha, the head of community in "the village of Little Marlow" (271) who, "elevated by reverence and love," and inspired by "her own native courage," did not escape the plague, but recovered from it (271).
The apocalyptic outburst of the Plague such dichotomies. The Plague, as the ultimate Other, means disease, contagion, death. A nation's fear of death cannot be dealt with in the way William Hazlitt, for instance, proposes a fear of death should be handled in his "On the Fear of Death" (1822), namely by reflecting "that life has a beginning as well as an end" (139). Verney's idea of nationhood echoes Burke's, whom, in fact, he quotes when the latter says that "the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts" (228). The parts may die, but the whole remains in a permanent course of "fall, renovation, progression" (228). Natural though it may seem, however, the organism of the nation is mortal. The introduction of the Plague reminisces the apocalyptic atmosphere generated by abrupt climactic change (Mount Tambora eruption), and affecting 1816—called "the year without a summer" (n. pag.), as Paley suggests — when Mary and Percy Shelley were on vacation in Lake Geneva along with their friend Lord Byron. The Plague comes from the East (The Last Man 223) as an "invincible monster," (221), inflicts Constantinople and Greece (221), and spreads its course pressingly towards Europe. Already, the Plague enters the narrative as a devastating expression to the political turbulence that the English Republic underwent; indeed, "in a post-Napoleonic age," as Bennett contends, "when conservative Europe restored monarchs to thrones, when a middle-class wanted its share of power within a newly established order that it could control, when both classes in England were frightened by working-class uprisings, the idea of a republican government replacing the monarchy was disruptive enough" (n. pag.). Hence the political subversiveness/rejectionism of the novel; as an anatomy of failed revolutions, to use Sterrenburg's phrase, the Plague comes as the final verdict that Romantic political views like "utopianism, Bonapartism, and revolutionary enthusiasms" (328) simply do not work. Raymond leaves the English domestic haven of Windsor, involves himself into English politics as an upholder of "the splendour of a

59 See Paley's "Mary Shelley's The Last Man: Apocalypse Without Millenium" (1989).
kingdom, in opposition to the commercial spirit of republicanism” (61) that Ryland supports, jeopardizes his marriage to Perdita, Verney's sister, for the sake of the politically deviant Evadne, and leaves England to pursue his ambition as leader in the Greek cause; in the end, he "is gone to the nations of the dead" (204), and Constantinople is destroyed by the grip of the Plague. Similarly, neither Adrian's utopianism proves capable of protecting England from death; in the end, as Sterrenburg comments, the plague "cancels out" all systems that include "the utopian rationality of Godwin" and "the conservative organicism of Edmund Burke" (335).

The new state of things has officially altered ideas of the nation as an organic body; in plain words, Verney explains that they "first had bidden adieu to the state of things which having existed many thousand years, seemed eternal; such a state of government, obedience, traffic, and domestic intercourse, as had moulded our hearts and capacities, as far back as memory could reach" (The Last Man 412). What is, then, this new state of things for the English nation? Critics like Anne McWhir and Audrey Fisch situate this future in a post-plague world that arrives as a destructive policy against conceptions of nationhood and empire. Lionel's focus, as Fisch claims, "on the imperial ship of state, England" (269), and his stay in Italy as a pillar of the European civilization (The Last Man 461) not only relies on a discourse of English self-imposed superiority, as we have seen, but also forms itself in conjunction with and juxtaposition to the others. As a critique of imperial ambition and cruelty, The Last Man poses itself as a force of deconstruction (273), as Fisch says; in Sterrenburg's words, it is "the most expansive in its allusions to political writings and events from the era of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire, and the Greek revolution against the Turks during the 1820s" (327). More importantly, The Last Man stages an ambivalent encounter between the self of the nation and the other outside its self-defined, albeit imaginary, borders. The "colony" by which Verney likens their attempt to form a
temporary community at Versailles (383) is part of imperial discourse that differentiates the
other, brands it as a "lawless spirit," like the Plague, that invades England (298), and, most
importantly, strives to resist its presence as "a negro half-clad," who, at the moment of his
encounter with Verney, writhed "under the agony of disease," while he held him "with a
convulsive gasp:" "With mixed horror and impatience I strove to disengage myself, and fell
on the sufferer; he wound his naked festering arms around me, his face was close to mine,
and his breath, death-laden, entered my vital" (336-7). In this way, Shelley performs the
national self's fear to be contaminated, as Alan Bewell argues in his Romanticism and
Colonial Disease (1999), by the colonial others (313), the "dark evil Other" (27) associated
with the Gothic that Khair sees penetrating a lot of nineteenth-century narratives.

The ghastly breath of the other thus infects the previously healthy organism of the
nation-state of England, a conception that came to existence as a term during the age of the
American and French Revolutions, as Hobsbawm illustrates, and which was essentially "the
body of citizens whose collective sovereignty constituted them a state which was their
political expression" (18-9). That this body of citizens in The Last Man is reduced into the
body of the last man seems to be very much the case, since Verney's is presented as the only
human voice left by the time the plague abandons its seat. In this respect, I will agree with M.
Royce Kallerud who, in his discussion of the way Shelley deconstructs the destructive effects
of the law of the social contract, equates Verney with "the body politic" (n. pag.) per se. This
means that Verney's danger as reflecting the danger of the body politic emanates from its
contact with the infectious other; indeed, what nationhood is perceived to be is heavily
defined by what Colley calls a "conscious opposition to the Other beyond their shores" (316).
This very much resonates with the co-existent nationalism that permeates ideas of nationhood
in the novel, strives to attain "political legitimacy" (Gellner 1) against the other, and seeks to

60 Fisch parallels Shelley's imperial anti-contagionism with the more contemporary branding of AIDS as the
disease of otherness (268).
consolidate "homogeneity" (Gellner 46), both cultural and social. According to Makdisi, the West's relation with the Orient helped effect exactly that; contrary to the quite arbitrary portrayals of the Orient at the beginning of the eighteenth century, after Thomas Macaulay and his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), understandings of the East provided a more "self-satisfied durability" that impacted broadly "the status of imperial policy, and the nature of Britain's changing understanding of itself and its relation with its others – or rather Britain's changing understanding of itself in relation to its others" (62). This discourse of the other underwrote, even subtly at times, the writings of such diverse writers as William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott, as Makdisi also notices (62), together with many others that surely extend to Shelley's *The Last Man*. Even though it truly is the case that national identity definitely develops along with, and sometimes in tense interaction with, imperial expansion, Shelley does not simply connect the other with disease and the Plague (McWhir 7); rather, she introduces the Plague as the final outcome of a long course of national-imperial erroneous policies that are also the instigators of major divisions and injustices. In the post-plague world, Verney stands as the sole representative of a dead English nation.

What is the "y," then, that comes after the "d" (death) of the "b o d y"? the English people are "emigrants" (405) now, and their new condition has to be measured in connection to their continuous mobility throughout Europe. Charlotte Sussman's "'Islanded in the World': Cultural Memory and Human Mobility in 'The Last Man'" (2003) is probably the first comprehensive study of how nationhood and mobility are handled in Shelley's novel. In detail, Sussman is concerned with the question of whether the national and cultural community can be sustained by the few remaining English people, distanced from their homeland. While, however, Sussman ultimately suggests that both national community and cultural memory diminish as the people of England move away from their island, – the collective and the personal come together in Sussman's phrase "one body, one place" (288) –
I partly disagree with this view, and want to stress more than Sussman herself her other contention that there is the possibility of reimagining a different form of community that, despite what Sussman says about the weakened cultural memory, empowers itself through sympathy, mourning, and memory; "As countryman was wont to visit countryman in distant lands" (*The Last Man* 372), Verney and his compatriots join each other under the leadership of Adrian to form a community whose body struggles to remain whole: "no continued separation of our members was contemplated, and the command of the whole body in gradual ascent of power had its apex in the Earl of Windsor" (373). Throughout their journey, and even before their journey, in the face of the pestilence the English are seen drawing "closer the ties of kindred and friendship," and bestowing an "overflow of affection in triple portion on the few that remained" (273). Even under the direst circumstances, Verney, Adrian and the rest of the remaining English "never deserted any of their sick," and committed their dead "to the shelter of the grave" (409) by conducting the necessary rituals.

Undoubtedly, the ethics of mourning that accompany the death of a part of the English community expands from a general lamentation for the state of "sea-girt England" (377), to an individual scale that greatly concentrates on the death of Idris, Verney's wife, whose dead body nevertheless reflects the political body of England. Verney's farewell to England simultaneously turns into a farewell to the dead body of his wife: "Tomb of Idris, farewell! Grave, in which my heart lies sepulchred, farewell for ever!" (378). The maternal body of Idris and England's maternal body are left behind, just as is left behind every English dead body that is buried along the travellers' path; are they really left behind, however? Schor addresses a similar question: "If the dead, by virtue of our feeling for them, are essential to the moral sanity of society, might it not be said that they retain their membership in that society even in death?" (82). The practice of mourning and remembering the dead (a different utilization of the dead than the one witnessed in *Frankenstein*) follows *The Last
Man even to its last page, and constitutes part of the politics that also run through works like Percy Shelley's "An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte" (1817), in which the poet evokes the Athenian way of "celebrating with public mourning the death of those who guided the republic" (585), and argues that this practice "helps maintain that connection between one man and another, and all men considered as a whole" (585). Most importantly, however, Percy Shelley entreats the people of England to mourn the death of Liberty (591), and sustain intimacy with its corpse, in the hope that one day it might be resurrected (592). The political importance of the dead bears further importance for England in the process because, despite being a self-enclosed space, without neighbors, that contains her own dead, and that becomes "a wide, wide tomb" (The Last Man 248), it is carefully reconstructed as an idea to embrace her dead around the European landscape of death. In this context, Verney's resolution that "the world is our country now" (326) goes hand in hand with his contention that "[t]he nations are no longer!," an idea that presupposes the end of state and military enterprise, as well as the end of culture and the arts (321). Even more indicatively, Verney argues that "man's imagination is cold," a comment strangely relevant to what Marc Redfield terms as "imagi-nation" (55), the imaginary reconstruction of the nation tied up with "the state's aesthetic-cultural project" (59). Imagin-nation may seem impossible, but Verney's textual narrative of a nation's course tells a different story.

Is it possible, then, to imagine a kind of national community by the end of the novel? It is the progression of Verney's narrative that eventually renders England, to use Sussman's words, "a linguistic construction" (295). The novel runs its course, and England's body falls apart. But its narration exists, and runs parallel to what Bhabha perceives as the "political 'rationality'" of nationhood "as a form of narrative" (2). Bhabha is right when he indicates that, at the moment we approach the idea of nationhood textually, we have to take into consideration the "in-between" spaces (4) that characterize the nation's own "process" of
"articulation" (3), and that opens up spaces for the articulation of difference within ideas of selfhood. As Bhabha argues, the other is within the self (4), in exactly the same way that the narrative of the monster is already within the narrative of Victor Frankenstein; it emerges in this process of articulation.

In my view, it is exactly this process of articulation that Shelley wants to bring forward by narrating the "b o d y" of England, reconfiguring it, and setting it forth as a narrative in the form of scattered leaves, ready to be deciphered in fresh ways. Verney's dedication of his book "TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD" (466) condemns his book to an impossibility (265), as Johnson remarks. In any case, however, the "future perfect" (265) that Johnson sees as penetrating the prophetic history of the last man changes to its core this impossibility. Many critics like Anne Mellor, Lee Sterrenburg, and Charlotte Sussman comment either on the anti-political character of the novel, or its pessimistic atmosphere; few of the critics have paid particular attention to the temporal complexities (Johnson 266) in which it is caught, as one of the most important features in the novel. Whatever its outcome, *The Last Man* is a testament of the future that travels back in time in the form of a prophecy for the future. Rather than rendering it definite, I will agree with Ruppert when he says that *The Last Man* necessarily "complicates history" (151), both in its status as a prophecy and in its temporal back and forth. Because it disturbs the linear, progressive notion of history, Shelley's novel exposes history as "unstable" (Ruppert 147), complicated "as a resource for institutional forms of power" (151). Thereby, the agenda of *The Last Man* is highly political, especially apropos of the perceived contemporary waves of human mobility and "its cultural consequences" (Sussman 295). It is a prophetic story, rendered visible by a female prophetess (Ruppert 144), and composed by interacting spaces that narrate the nation and situate it within a female voice.
The deliverance of Shelley's political voice, however, is also eminent through her silences and purposeful omissions in leaving Verney alone and bereft at the end of the novel. A critic for the *Literary Gazette* wrote in 1826:

> When we repeat that these volumes are the production of a female pen, and that we have not ceased to consider Mrs. Shelley as a woman and a widow, we shall have given the clue to our abstinence from remarks upon them . . . Why not *the last Woman*? she would have known better how to paint her distress at having nobody left to talk to: we are sure the tale would have been more interesting. (February 18, 1826)

In the midst of, and in spite of, the sexist language that runs through the passage, the question the critic addresses should be rephrased: Where is the last woman? Why is Verney alone in the face of earth's desolation, and the sole representative of the English nation? Idris is left in her tomb in England, and her death, as Eve M. Lynch remarks when she analyzes the relationship between public and domestic space in the novel, is the product of a long process whereby the "suffocating enclosure and devotion to her husband" has eaten up the "vital principle' of her own health . . . as she slowly is consumed by disease and worry" (14). Is the "body of the male leader" (Fisch 276) enough? The absence of the female body next to Verney at the end of the novel presses the same question.

In conversation with the ethics of companionship which should have suffused the spirit of the English nation, and which also suffuse Shelley's political project in *Frankenstein*, Shelley's absences alert to the need for a "reformation," in Lynch's words, "modeled on ideals of public service concomitant with ideals of domestic service" (2). Reminiscent of Barbauld's "A Thought of Death" (1814), whose lines recount, among her general thoughts on death, "how easy 'tis to die" (ll. 12) when such "ties are torn/ And friend from friend is snatched forlorn./ And man is left alone to mourn" (ll. 9-11), the status of Verney as the last man
without the female presence by his side stays at the level of death and mourning. Reconstruction comes along only at the moment when the leaves are put together by an Englishwoman in 1818 (Ruppert 144), wrapped within the authorial voice of Shelley herself. Eventually, together with a renewed politics of domesticity, the narrative to be addressed to the future dead would belong to a nation whose story requires and presupposes the "regenerative power of the human imagination" (Ruppert 144), both in the sense of imagining the nation and reading into the in-between spaces of alterity, and in the sense of the reforming power of imagination itself. In reading the story through the body of the nation, the body becomes meaningful in all its fractures and contradictions. After all, as Salman Rushdie writes in his *Imaginary Homelands* (1992),

> we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. . . . Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death. (12)

*Both Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* are about these "inadequate materials" that actually shape the body politic and its practices. In rather different ways, the body of the nation acquires meaning and forms part of Shelley's politics about the future.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have focused on *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* because of the way both texts constitute highly indicative examples of how the body metaphor is used to show the way the national body of England appears underneath its organic, steadily progressing facade in important, albeit quite different, contexts. The English national body that presents itself both in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* may require different paths of interpretation, but they both are undeniable products of an age of radical change, reform, revolution, and war. In both instances, the French Revolution triggered a plethora of transformations, both political and social, that in their turn produced discourses about how a "healthy" national body is imagined, and what its enemies consist of. Mary Shelley lays open such imaginings by placing face-to-face the imaginary body politic with its own monstrosity, or, in the case of *The Last Man*, the possibility of its own death. In staging such a conflict within the premises of the Gothic, Shelley issues her own political commentary for the great events of her time.

Apart from their socio-political reflections, however, the suitability of both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* for studying the condition of the English body politic during that time lies in their being post-revolutionary (my emphasis) narratives. Indeed, the first two decades following the advent of the French Revolution were formative for the English national body, not only because of the body politic's reaction to the revolutionary fervour, but also because of the conservative backlash that followed the Napoleonic Wars, and that firmly strove to consolidate English national and imperial identity against the national, the feminine, the imperial other. Taking all these into consideration, it was interesting for me to explore how Mary Shelley goes from exposing the Janus-faced English body of the nation in *Frankenstein*, and bringing the anti-nation to the surface, to fully examining if and how viable resurrecting England's dead body can be in the context of catastrophe, mobility, and
disillusionment in *The Last Man*. *The Last Man* is, indeed, a kind of "hideous progeny" (F 10) of the 1820s, a product of a decade of turbulence and repression.

Simultaneously, and with a gestated glance distanced from the revolutionary enthusiasm of the 1780s-90s, Mary Shelley's political ideas turn back to and revolve around the national, familial body, the nation as family, offspring of the active participation of women, and free from several forms of oppression. Mostly, Shelley's political programme lies in the idea of finding identity within the family; and the nation as family furthers her idea of identifying oneself within a functional, familial nationhood. But in order to reconstruct identity and render it functional, one should first engage in deconstructing it. This is why the Gothic comes in, and allows the monster/other to speak; as Halberstam rightly claims, "[i]t is the propensity for the monster to deconstruct at any time, to always be in the process of decomposition, that makes it/him/her a fugitive from identity" (37). Ultimately, Mary Shelley moulds identity on a careful infusion of the personal into the political (in both narratives), and vice versa; this is why critics like Lynch talk about Shelley's stress on "reformation" (2) in *The Last Man* that further points to Shelley's desire for a functional community.

In this case, I agree with Mellor's contention that Shelley "had been taught to conceive of her self only in relational terms, as a daughter/wife/mother" (169), and, by extension, as a member of a national community that did not stop affecting her even during the times she left England with Percy Shelley in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Indeed, her *History of A Six Week's Tour* is full of subtle yet systematically present comments on the English being compared with European others (see, for instance, Shelley's account of the "drinking Germans" (56), or the habit of kissing "one another" in front of the Shelleys' "English eyes" (68)). Even concerning what Mellor sees as a "grimly pessimistic novel" (148) like *The Last Man*, I do not entirely see into Mellor's conclusion that Shelley finally shows the futility of all, "including her own theory of the egalitarian bourgeois family" (149). The body of
England may not have escaped death in *The Last Man*, but its story is still there, to be discovered and put together. Identity, then, comes to the surface through the process of articulating it, and exposing the contradictions that inform it. And, of course, this happens in both narratives through the body as metaphor; after all, identity (self-knowledge) and the body are indispensable to each other.

Shelley's project, as it is, is significant as a tribute to a period of time when "Darkness/ . . . was the Universe" (ll. 81-2), to quote from Byron's *Darkness* poem, and as a legacy to a future where the idea of the British nation came to be shaped through Empire and national assertion throughout the nineteenth century. That several political systems were contested in *Frankenstein* and proven ineffectual in *The Last Man* is highly predictive of the course the British Empire underwent well into the twentieth century. Being inherently monstrous, the British Empire as a monstrous body is equally based on the idea of the "healthy" body, whose parts are "organically" connected to each other, versus the "unhealthy" imperial body. This "inter-dependence of its parts," as John Darwin suggests, "on each other or with the centre of the system, and, as the system develops, the assumption by each of a specific function or role" (3), forms the idea of the British Empire as body, whose actual death from the 1940s onwards can raise questions as to what happens to twentieth-century ideas of nationhood and Empire.

Throughout the course of its birth, rise, and death, the British Empire evidently fed from and fuelled British national identity, as is evident in both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, and researching the idea of the British Empire as a body is certainly correlated with the way the nation passed through birth, death, and beyond in Mary Shelley's novels. It is true that a detailed account of the way the Empire functions as a body, and, if possible, how this idea is represented in the discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, certainly exceeds the scope of this thesis, yet offers valuable food for thought on further examining the
subject in a another research project. The trope of the body as a way of examining, processing, and knowing is certainly correlative to how the British Empire actually functions.

Hence the importance of studying Shelley's novels; this thesis is not only preoccupied with Shelley's responses, but also with the fact that it was Mary Shelley's active involvement as a woman writer in the discourses of her times, and in the political predictions of the decades to come, that assigns a special role to the politics of these two pieces of work, and makes evident the need to save from obscurity such works like Shelley's *The Last Man*. The complexity of *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, in particular, should not obstruct their deep involvement into contesting the national through their narratives; far from limiting the texts to an especially established number of interpretations, the complexities and intricacies of meaning that both novels invite should advance interdisciplinary approaches that dig deep into the socio-political levels of the narratives, bring the different body parts of the text into discussion with each other, and allow the possibility of the national self to be found through a woman's voice, the voice of the Other. More than that, Shelley's novels make one wonder as to what relevance her political ideas have today, in a world where the idea of the nation is constantly threatened by the ever increasing force of globalization and internationalism. This project certainly proves ambitious, and offers stimuli for further research.
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APPENDIX

Fig. 1: James Gillray’s *The Contrast* (1793).

Fig. 2: Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* (1782).
Fig. 3: William Blake's *The House of Death* (c. 1790).

Fig. 4: James Gillray's *King George III* (*The French Invasion; or John Bull, Bombarding the Bum-Boats*) (1793).
Fig. 5: John Ruskin's "True and False Griffins" (1856).

Fig. 6: Charles Waterton's *John Bull and the National Debt* (1807).