

Pandemic and Politics in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*¹

Michelle Gadpaille
University of Maribor

Abstract. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, readers and scholars turn to previous pandemic writing. Among the accounts of past pandemics, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) might not be the most familiar, although it stands out, not merely because of its female author and futuristic, dystopian mode. Its real distinction is that it predicts the social and political fallout of a pandemic in ways that echo the global experience of coronavirus reaction over the last few years, specifically, the ideological polarization created by anti-pandemic measures.

Keywords: Mary Shelley, plague narrative, dystopia.

1. Introduction: Writing the plague

Living through a pandemic has always led some survivors to record their experiences, whether with the disease itself or with the social fallout from decimation. An early historical text is that of Michael Platiensis, who records the arrival of the plague on the island of Sicily in 1347, while the classic narrative in English is Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). These European narratives, separated by 375 years, both influenced Mary Shelley's apocalyptic novel *The Last Man* (1826). Like her predecessors, Shelley describes the fearful rumors, the arrival of the novel disease, the rising death rate, the quest for refuge and the final breaking of the wave of plague over a stricken population. Even in the late twenty-first century of the novel's setting, Shelley's characters "called to mind the plague of 1348, when it was calculated that a third of mankind had been destroyed" (Shelley 2008, 233). From Platiensis, Shelley takes the motif of the arrival of the plague-stricken ship in a European harbor, although her doomed ship comes from Philadelphia, not the east (Shelley 2008, 217). Shelley herself had not lived through one of the major outbreaks of *Yersinia pestis* in Europe. At the time of writing *The Last Man*, a cholera pandemic had arisen in India and was spreading rapidly. This did not reach Great Britain until long after the novel was published (not until 1832), but English awareness of the disease would have come through the British military, which was engaged in the affected regions (McGrew 1960, 61).

Shelley's is not therefore a documentary record of a disease pandemic, rather a speculative projection of how a catastrophic plague could alter social and political norms. *The Last Man*, I will argue, anatomizes one feature of pandemic politics that will be familiar to us from the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-22: the political weaponization of denial.

¹ This research was conducted as part of the bilateral research project "Pandemic Literature in the USA and Slovenia," project number BI-US/22-24-177.

2. Shelley's life and fiction

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born into an unusual family, in 1797, the daughter of the rationalist philosopher William Godwin, an early supporter of atheistic individualism, and his wife Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Fulfilling her intellectually and socially rebellious destiny, Mary escaped to Italy with the married poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Out of the chaotic perambulations of this couple and their friends came her novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), considered by some to be the first science-fiction novel in English (Sterrenburg 1978, 347; van der Laan 2010, 298; Holmes 2016, 490). Following her husband's tragic death, Mary Shelley kept writing: a journal, letters, a travel memoir and five long novels. Among the latter group is *The Last Man*, in which Shelley works through the romantic entanglements of her youth, while projecting a political experiment into the final decades of the twenty-first century.

The Last Man has been read as a *roman à clef*, where Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Mary's step-sister Claire Clairmont are ill-concealed in the guise of the fictional characters: Adrian, Lord Raymond and Perdita, respectively (Peck 1923, 198; Ruppert 2009, 149; Murphy 2020, n.p.). Sufficient has been written about this aspect of the novel (Peck 1923, 202-214; Sterrenburg 1978, 327-328; Lokke 2003, 117; Paley 2008, xvi-xix), and I will not explore it further.

If you have not yet read *The Last Man*, should you run out and buy, borrow or download it? Well, perhaps not. Its language is inflated, its apostrophic digressions are dated, and its pages littered with poetic excerpts. In its defense, Shelley does analyze the psychological dynamics of male-female relationships. Though she depicts the kind of passionate love that she had known with Percy Bysshe Shelley, her book shows the erosion of such love in the futile blame game of the participants in the fading love match between Lord Raymond and Perdita. Her depiction of marriage dynamics is far ahead of its time; English literature lacks its equal until George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-1872). In the novel's leisurely chronicle of revolution and social breakdown, disease does not enter until volume II of *The Last Man*, which is a three-volume novel.

3. Plot of *The Last Man*

Since this novel is long and, unlike *Frankenstein*, not canonical, I will offer a brief sketch of its plot. The story begins with the end of the British monarchy in 2073 (Shelley 2008, 20). Thereafter, the narrator, Lionel Verney, follows the entangled social and political lives of a group of friends who take leadership positions in the new republic. Lord Raymond attempts to rule the country as the Protector until he leaves to fight in the Greek-Turkish wars, where he is wounded and dies. Subsequently, the arrival of the plague on the shores of England destroys centralized governance, even the enlightened regime of Adrian, Earl of Windsor. City and country are in turn devastated, family members die and a small party including Verney, his niece Clara and Adrian, now the Protector, flee to Europe in search of a warmer climate. After a pause in Paris, where a plague-denial cult has taken over, the much-depleted group treks on to Italy. Verney, Adrian and Clara are the last three survivors until the latter two drown off the coast of Italy, and

Verney becomes the titular Last Man, who proceeds alone to Rome and thence by boat, perhaps to India.

But wait—we learn that these are not events but prophesied events. The novel's frame relates the finding of scattered fragments of an ancient prophetic story by an unnamed nineteenth-century person, possibly female, possibly Shelley herself (Lokke 2003, 132). This external narrator has reassembled the oracular fragments to reveal the tale of the plague and the last man on earth. The reader tends to forget along the way that Verney's story is only a prophecy by the Cumaean Sibyl from a distant classical past, inscribed on oak leaves and requiring re-animation in the early nineteenth-century. What matters to us is that it foretells the end of the twenty-first century, bridging millennia, in fact. Shelley's novel is the fictional equivalent of a message in a bottle (Morton 2003, 264), discovered, re-inscribed and passed forward.

4. The coming of the plague

In volume II of *The Last Man*, the plague enters the consciousness of the English characters as a rumor, a mere word: "This enemy of the human race had begun early in June to raise its serpent-head on the shores of the Nile" (Shelley 2008, 175). The disease approaches from the east, afflicting Constantinople, where the Turkish war is raging and Lord Raymond is bound, then Athens (Shelley 2008, 223), France and Italy (Shelley 2008, 235). Once the disease has crossed the Channel, the description of a deserted London recalls our own recent experience of lockdown: "[. . .] since the commencement of the visitation, London appeared sufficiently changed. There were no carriages, and grass had sprung high in the streets; the houses had a desolate look; most of the shutters were closed; and there was a ghast and frightened stare in the persons I met, very different from the usual business-like demeanour of the Londoners" (Shelley 2008, 250). Within months, desertion has given way to mass death, or as Shelley metaphorically expresses it, "the banqueting hall of death was spread only in London" (2008, 281).

4.1. Origin theories and isolationism

As it moves across Europe (not as swiftly as the recent coronavirus, since travel is more leisurely in Shelley's imagined decade of the 2090s), various theories of its cause are advanced. Most people blame "effluvia" (Shelley 2008, 188) or "pestilential air" (192), relying on what Wills (2020, n.p.) calls "the now-outdated miasma theory of disease," and imagine that a cold winter will help to dissipate it (Shelley 2008, 195). "It was called an epidemic. But the grand question was still unsettled of how this epidemic was generated and increased" (Shelley 2008, 231). This causal uncertainty leads to hesitation and over-confidence about the protective effect of geographical separation: "there was no immediate necessity for an earnest caution [. . . Being an island, it was felt,] England was still secure" (Shelley 2008, 231). Only after the plague has arrived in London do the inhabitants see the futility of their myth of isolation:

[W]e fancied that the little channel between our island and the rest of the earth was to preserve us alive among the dead. It were no mighty leap methinks from Calais to Dover [. . .] the sea was to raise a wall of adamant—without, disease, and

misery—within, a shelter from evil, a nook of the garden of paradise—a particle of celestial soil, which no evil could invade—truly we were wise in our generation, to imagine all these things! (Shelley 2008, 248).

Even the narrator, Verney, succumbs at one point to the illusion that he can save his family by seeking “uncontaminated seclusion” (Shelley 2008, 243).

4.2. Skepticism and denial

Some leaders are skeptical of the danger and ridicule any attempt to plan for the arrival of the contagion in Britain (Shelley 2008, 221). The plague denial and downplaying depicted in *The Last Man* are described by Olivia Murphy as similar to Britain’s real historical actions, “ventriloquizing the complacent response from England to early signs of disease in its colonies” (Murphy 2020, n.p.). As in the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders initially worry more about the impact on trade and the economy in general than about losing their population. There is a theory that “in a year or two pestilence would cease” (Shelley 2008, 237). However, it soon becomes apparent that “the epidemic was gifted with a virulence before unfelt” (Shelley 2008, 223) and that an escape to the country is not a permanent solution (223). The year 2094 proves to be the *annus horribilis* for England (Shelley 2008, 239). Given the uncertainty about origin, the privileging of commerce over life, and the deluded denialism of a few leaders, Shelley has anticipated our twenty-first-century experience of the pandemic. What differs with the novel’s plague is its fatality rate—almost 100%; nevertheless, Verney does survive his infection (Shelley 2008, 342-343); moreover, Shelley’s futuristic society has not advanced medically to the point of vaccines, so there is no treatment, either preventive or curative.

4.3. Racist conjecture

As with COVID-19, there are indications in Shelley’s futuristic England of ethnocentrism, “racist assumptions” (Murphy 2020, n.p.) and even outright racism in the attribution of the plague’s origin and spread. “It [the plague] is of old a native of the East, sister of the tornado, the earthquake, and the simoon. Child of the sun, and nursling of the tropics, it would expire in these climes. It drinks the dark blood of the inhabitant of the south, but it never feasts on the pale-faced Celt” (Shelley 2008, 233). Even welcoming travellers from the East is initially thought to be safe for Europe: “If perchance some stricken Asiatic come among us, plague dies with him, uncommunicated and innoxious” (Shelley 2008, 233). This imperialist ideology proves wrong as the plague enters Europe. Verney’s own experience disproves the concept of Celtic imperviousness: he eventually catches the infection from a dying Negro who collapses against him as Verney is returning to his family. By the time England has ceased to be a place of refuge from the plague and has become instead a place fled by pandemic refugees, it is clear that “this sense of racial superiority and immunity is unfounded” (Murphy 2020, n.p.).

Overall, the impression in the novel of an advanced western-European civilization unfairly wiped out by a contagion brought in from places far to the east is reminiscent of the conspiracy theories and ethnic name-calling and

bullying that accompanied the recent pandemic. Shelley's plague originated with the Other and results in the destruction of whatever bulwark of values had been erected against the Other.

4.4. Leadership failure

If the novel has a villain other than disease, it is Ryland, the nominal Protector of England, who must abandon his oligarchical principles and reveal his incompetence once the plague threatens. "He was incapable of meeting these evils by any comprehensive system; he had resorted to expedient after expedient, and could never be induced to put a remedy in force, till it came too late to be of use" (Shelley 2008, 131). Ryland gives in to despair and refuses the burden of leadership, which then falls on Adrian, the scion of the former royal family and the figure modelled on Percy Shelley. Ryland talks the politician's talk, but in times of crisis he retreats to a selfish and despairing individualism. This lies in contrast to Adrian's insistence that community offers the only solace in extreme conditions. Ryland, we later learn, dies alone in the solitary spot to which he had retreated for an illusory safety, surrounded by hoarded food (Shelley 2008, 319). The plague thus exposes the failings of the conservative, aristocratic, oligarchic view of power and temporarily validates Adrian's more socialist, communitarian, egalitarian ideal—even though Adrian, ironically, is the real aristocrat.

Shelley's plague of 2094, then, resembles that of 2019-2022 in these four features: conspiracy theories surrounding the origin of the disease; reliance on exclusion and national isolation; racist ideology and actions accompanying its onset; and failures of leadership both before and after the arrival of the epidemic. There is one further similarity involving the appearance of a strong pandemic denial movement led by a charismatic figure.

5. Personality cult

In 2021, a pastor from a Los Angeles megachurch confidently proclaimed "There is no pandemic" (Henderson 2021, n.p.). This denialist mindset was surprisingly common in America and is well summed up by an article in the *Washington Post*: "Downplaying the threat and refusing to comply with social distancing measures require an indifference toward the common good, a certainty that the ends will justify the means and a brash confidence that God will be on one's own side" (Du Mez 2020, n.p.). A similar certainty emerges as a pandemic outcome in *The Last Man*: after 150 pages analyzing governance issues in the futuristic England (monarchists versus republicans), Shelley complicates the challenges of leadership by having the English remnant abandon England for the continent. There she introduces a figure called the "impostor prophet," who heads one faction of the English refugees in Paris (Shelley 2008, 380-381). The reader's insight into the religious group is facilitated by their recruitment of Juliet, a sympathetic female character who occupies one of the novel's many sub-narratives. Widowed, alone and a single mother, Juliet epitomizes the vulnerable person who often falls into the clutches of a cult-like belief system, those "panic struck and tamed by sorrow" (Shelley 2008, 387). This prophet exploits vulnerability by "desir[ing] to rule over these last stragglers from the fold of

death” (Shelley 2008, 386). Verney tries to save Juliet, and the reader first anticipates another of the novel’s rescued-maiden incidents. However, this time, reader expectations are dashed: Verney is captured by the cult and released only by Juliet herself, whom Verney describes as a “dupe” and “misguided victim” (Shelley 2008, 392).

Shelley’s nameless prophet builds on established religion but extends its teaching to exact complete subordination to the group and its leader, who is “instigated by ambition” (Shelley 2008, 386) and leads, not to keep his flock alive, but to prolong his own leadership. The Elite, as the group is called, thus resembles modern-day cults. It further recalls the recent pandemic experience by its insistence that they alone offer any hope in the face of the plague. The Elite exacts obedience in return for exclusive submission to a divine will (in reality, the will of the leader) (Shelley 2008, 385-386). Juliet becomes “a steadfast proselyte, and powerful auxiliary to the leader of the elect” (Shelley 2008, 388). The group does not believe in any of the methods of avoidance practiced by Adrian’s group, nor will they agree to seek a warmer climate as a method for potential survival. The Elite resembles the various anti-vaccine, anti-mask, “plandemic” and virus-hoax groups that sprang up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the US. In contrast to the situation in 2020 and 2021, the opposing, normative group in Shelley’s England and Paris lacks any solid prophylactic—no vaccines, no masks, no medicines, not even any coherent theory of social distancing, to offer its adherents. The line between the two sides is thus less clearly science versus anti-science, but hopeful communal action versus despairing individualist capitulation. In 2020, the polarization (Coren 2021, n.p.) often came disguised as alternate science, among congregations in North America and parts of Europe “that have rejected vaccines and even social distancing and masks” (Coren 2021, n.p.). The anti-science factor in denialism became evident in the overlap between COVID denial and climate denial, as reported by the BBC in 2021 (Spring 2021, n.p.).

5.1. Concealment of the truth

The imposter prophet maintains his flock by offering blind faith and false assertions, which are “false, yet vehemently asserted” (Shelley 2008, 385). In this way, Shelley anticipates the “fake news” component of the COVID-19 pandemic, as her narrator notes the power of these false assertions over “the ready credulity of the ignorant and fearful” (Shelley 2008, 385). Then, as now, disinformation and “hypocritical jargon” (Shelley 2008, 390) “seldom failed in drawing over to their party some from among our numbers” (Shelley 2008, 385-386). Verney diagnoses correctly that the prophet rules through fear (Shelley 2008, 390) and maintains the level of fear by artifice, cruelty and fraud (Shelley 2008, 392). Journalists from the *New York Times*, writing during the recent pandemic, diagnosed similar features in the COVID skepticism of evangelical movements in the United States: “some have been energized by what they see as a battle between faith and fear, and freedom and persecution” (Dias and Graham 2021, n.p.). Concealment props up the illusion of safety offered by the prophet’s cult; thus, any deaths within the cult are denied: “Those who sickened were immediately and quietly withdrawn [. . .] while some plausible excuse was given for their absence”

(Shelley 2008, 406). Nor do the prophet's actions pursue from sincere belief; according to Verney the false leader is "fully aware of the lie" (Shelley 2008, 406), resembling the twenty-first-century politicians who, possessed of the latest scientific data, nevertheless led their party/country in the opposite direction: "5 Leaders Who Mishandled the COVID-19 Pandemic" (Garguly 2021, n.p.), or "The Notorious Nine: These World Leaders Responded to the Coronavirus with Denial, Duplicity and Ineptitude" (York et al. 2020, n.p.). Garguly's top five made the list by early denial of the pandemic and active propagation of misinformation. A similar issue of power drives the cultists in *The Last Man*, where concealment of the unpalatable death toll functions to burnish the power of the false prophet, as some regions in the US did in 2021 to prop up the anti-science stance of their leaders.

5.2. Violence

Shelley's narrative even anticipates one of the most negative effects of the rise of a populist leader at a time of crisis: proxy violence—of the kind evident on January 6th, 2021 at the Capitol building in Washington DC. Here is how Verney tells the story:

I found everything in a state of tumult. An emissary of the leader of the elect, had been so worked up by his chief, and by his own fanatical creed, as to make an attempt on the life of the Protector and preserver of lost mankind [i.e. Adrian]. His hand was arrested while in the act of poignarding the Earl [. . .] the wretch [. . .] vaunted his design, and madly claimed the crown of martyrdom" (Shelley 2008, 404-405).

Verney explains this cult-like pattern of behavior by evoking human nature under stress: "Men love a prop so well, that they will lean on a pointed poisoned spear; and such was he, the impostor, who, with fear of hell for his scourge, most ravenous wolf, played the driver to a credulous flock" (Shelley 2008, 405). The metaphor of the wolf, previously applied to the plague itself, has here been transferred to the cult leader who feeds on human fear and vulnerability. Ultimately, the imposter prophet escalates from inciting violence among his followers to being violent himself: he stabs his follower Juliet, who has finally denounced him to the group: then "the wretch with that energy of purpose, which had borne him thus far in his guilty career, saw his danger, and resolved to evade the worst forms of it—he rushed on one of the foremost, seized a pistol from his girdle, and his loud laugh of derision mingled with the report of the weapon with which he destroyed himself" (Shelley 2008, 407). This kind of crisis leader relies on intimidation and violence and yet accrues the most fanatical followers. To be clear, Shelley does not distinguish between two types of ordinary people—the followers of either Adrian or the false prophet. Instead, Shelley reveals that it is the *leader's* character and motivation that differentiate one group from the other. Habitually pacifist, Adrian leads by example, and though he has (by twenty-first-century standards) no greater hope of cure to offer, he at least guides with honesty, imagination and selflessness.

6. A conclusion and a speculation

These final parallels between *The Last Man* and the recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the US, struck me forcefully on re-reading this novel during lockdown. That disinformation and denial should emerge in a pandemic had previously seemed a twenty-first-century phenomenon, born of the World Wide Web with its dark niches where odd conspiracies could flourish. But here was Shelley in the 1820s clearly anticipating how fake news, forcefully enunciated, could be harnessed by an amoral leader to impose a false reality in which followers would live or die. Whether modern science or traditional religious belief, both could be twisted to uphold the power base of an unscrupulous leadership. Suddenly, the oracular frame in which Shelley had wrapped her tale became a mirror of the author's own Sibylline act of prophecy.

Let us talk about that framing story, which may be the least persuasive feature of *The Last Man* for the twenty-first-century reader; we are likely to balk at that fragmented, leaf-inscribed prophecy from ancient times. Nor do we believe in the frenzied trances of the Cumaean Sibyl. But before judging, let us pause to acknowledge two aspects of the frame: first, Shelley's daring connection of pagan antiquity to her own imaginatively-driven Romantic era, and her projection 250 years ahead. Though unable to foresee the industrial revolution, fossil-fuel exploitation, jet planes and a few other things, Shelley nevertheless correctly saw that what human beings will become is always conditioned by the lessons learned (or not learned) about our shared humanity. Therefore, it is vital to transmit those lessons across centuries and even millennia. Second, an analogy for the scattered leaves on which the prophecy was written does exist in our own time; even in a sceptical age, we have our own time-travelling narratives. Consider the Future Library Project, an art installation by Katie Paterson (n.d.) that stores multiple texts (by writers such as Margaret Atwood and Karl Ove Knausgård) to be opened and published only in 2114 when the forest will have grown sufficiently to provide the wood pulp to make the paper on which these texts can then be printed—if, that is, human beings are still around and printing is still a thing. Paterson's unique art has added the dimension of deep time to art; Shelley's *The Last Man* moves freely in this dimension, constructing a tale from the mythological past, to be assembled in her present (which is our past), and foretelling the distant future (our century) in which the tale is composed and written down, thus re-initiating the narrative cycle. Shelley's conception is of a Möbius loop of narrative floating in deep time, and, just as Future Library is built on trust, Shelley's vision of leadership/governance is equally dependent on the mutual trust of mortal beings that wisdom can be transmitted through time in the "time capsule" of imaginative writing (Atwood 2022, 243).

References

- ATWOOD, Margaret. 2022. "Future Library (2015)." In *Burning Questions: Essays and Occasional Pieces 2004 to 2021*, 243-244. New York: Doubleday.
- COREN, Michael. 2021. "How the Christian Right is Driving the Anti-Vax Movement." *The New Statesman*, 1 December, 2021. <https://www.newstatesman.com/international->

- politics/society-international-politics/2021/12/how-the-christian-right-is-driving-the-anti-vaxx-movement.
- DIAS, Elizabeth and Ruth Graham. 2021. "White Evangelical Resistance is Obstacle in Vaccination Effort." *The New York Times*, 5 April 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/05/us/covid-vaccine-evangelicals.html>.
- DU MEZ, Kristin Kobes. 2020. "Some Evangelicals Deny the Coronavirus Threat. It's Because They Love Tough Guys." *Washington Post*, 2 April 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/04/02/conservative-evangelicals-coronavirus-tough-guys/>.
- GARGULY, Sumit. 2021. "5 Leaders Who Mishandled the COVID-19 Pandemic." *U.S. News*, 18 May 2021. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-05-18/5-leaders-who-badly-mishandled-the-covid-19-pandemic>.
- HENDERSON, Alex. 2021. "'There is no Pandemic': How a LA Megachurch Became a Bastion of Evangelical Coronavirus Denial." *Salon*, 18 August 2021. https://www.salon.com/2021/08/18/there-is-no-pandemic-how-a-la-megachurch-became-a-bastion-of-evangelical-coronavirus-denial_partner/.
- HOLMES, Richard. 2016. "Science Fiction: The Science that Fed *Frankenstein*." *Nature* 535: 490-491.
- LOKKE, Kari E. 2003. "The Last Man." In *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, edited by Esther Schor, 116-134. Cambridge: CUP.
- MCGREW, Robert E. 1960. "The First Cholera Epidemic and Social History." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 34 (1): 61-73.
- MORTON, Timothy. 2003. "Mary Shelley as Cultural Critic." In *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, edited by Esther Schor, 259-273. Cambridge: CUP.
- MURPHY, Olivia. 2020. "The Last Man by Mary Shelley is a Prophecy of Life in a Global Pandemic." *The Conversation*, May 2020, University of Sydney. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2020/05/05/mary-shelley-s-the-last-man-is-a-prophecy-of-life-in-a-global-pa.html>.
- PALEY, Morton D. 2008. "Introduction," *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley, edited by Morton Paley, vii-xxiii. Oxford: OUP.
- PATERSON, Katie. N.d. *Future Library*. <https://www.futurelibrary.no/>.
- PECK, Walter Edwin. 1923. "The Biographical Element in the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley." *PMLA* 38 (1): 196-219.
- RUPPERT, Timothy. 2009. "Time and the Sibyl in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*." *Studies in the Novel* 41 (2): 141-56. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24027145>.
- SHELLEY, Mary Wollstonecraft. 2008. *The Last Man*. 1826. Edited by Morton D. Paley. Oxford: OUP.
- SPRING, Marianna. 2021. "Covid Denial to Climate Denial: How conspiracists are Shifting Focus." *BBC News*, 16 November 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-59255165>.
- STERRENBURG, Lee. 1978. "The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (3): 324-347.
- VAN DER LAAN, James M. 2010. "Frankenstein as Science Fiction and Fact." *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 30 (4): 298-304.
- WILLS, Matthew. 2020. "Disease Theory in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*." *JSTOR Daily*, April 2020. <https://daily.jstor.org/disease-theory-in-mary-shelleys-the-last-man/>.
- YORK, Geoffrey, Mark Mackinnon, Nathan Vanderklippe and Adrian Morrow. 2020. "The Notorious Nine: These World Leaders Responded to the Coronavirus with Denial, Duplicity and Ineptitude." *The Globe & Mail*, 21 April 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-the-notorious-nine-these-world-leaders-responded-to-the-coronavirus/>.