

# *The Last Man (1826)*



## *Mary Shelley's Life & Times*

### Sources

St. Clair, William. *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The biography of a family*. New York: Norton, 1989.

various essays in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Age of Romanticism*.

various essays in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period*.

# Famous Parents

# Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97)

---

- ❖ family of origin: troubled
- ❖ maternal figure to sisters, students, young charges
- ❖ free thinking & affairs
- ❖ Gilbert Imlay and child Fanny
- ❖ suicide attempts
- ❖ marriage, pregnancy, death



by John Opie (c.1797)

# *Literary Works*

---

- ❖ *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787)
- ❖ *Mary: A Fiction* (1788)
- ❖ *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788)
- ❖ *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790)
- ❖ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

# William Godwin (1756-1836)

---

- ❖ family of origin: middle-class; strictly Calvinist
- ❖ 1782: comes to London to reform humanity w/ pen
- ❖ abandons Christianity; writes “republican,” polemical writings
- ❖ 1797: marries Mary Wollstonecraft
- ❖ 1801: marries Mary Jane Clairmont



by James Northcote (1802)

# *Political Justice* (1793, 1796, 1798)

---

- ❖ composed quickly, just prior to war w/ France
- ❖ Godwin modifies ideas w/ each new edition
- ❖ envisions stateless society; decries monarchy
- ❖ “political justice” = *just* action towards *everyone*
- ❖ illustration about fire & writer Francois Fénelon

# *Political Justice* (1793, 1796, 1798)

---

- ❖ necessity (w/ some small measure of free will)
- ❖ perfectibility over entropy
- ❖ sincerity over obfuscation
- ❖ reason over emotion
- ❖ no personal property

# Godwin's approach to sexual politics

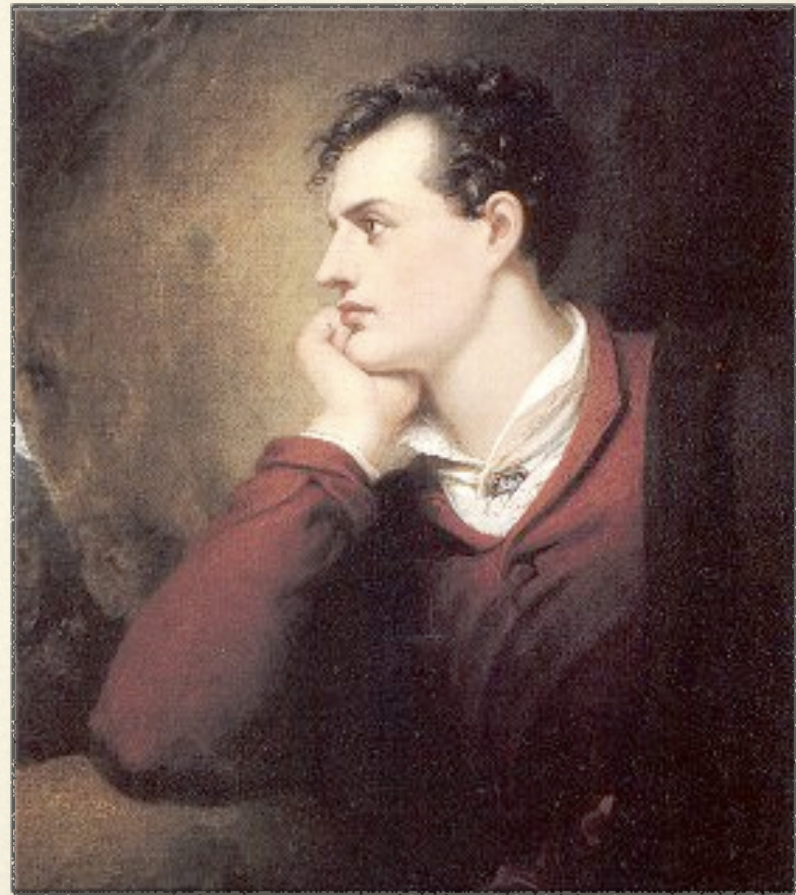
---

- ❖ ideas
  - ❖ marriage immoral because monopolizing
  - ❖ sex as pragmatic, unattached to passion
- ❖ experience
  - ❖ London women too playful; unserious
  - ❖ Mary Wollstonecraft: marriage, emotion
  - ❖ *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Jan. 1798)



# George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824)

- ❖ impoverished childhood
- ❖ appearance, diet, foot, sports
- ❖ 1798: at age 10, becomes the 6th (wealthy) Lord Byron
- ❖ 1809: begins sitting in House of Lords; travels to Greece; starts writing *Childe Harold*
- ❖ 1816: leaves England permanently; lives in:
  - ❖ Geneva, Switzerland
  - ❖ Venice, Italy
  - ❖ Pisa, Italy
  - ❖ Missolonghi, Greece



by Richard Westall (1813)

# Sexual Experience

---

- ❖ molested as a child by his nursemaid
- ❖ experience w/ males in Greece
- ❖ affair instigated by ravenous Lady Caroline Lamb
- ❖ Jan. 1815: marries Annabella Milabanke
- ❖ affair w/ half-sister Augusta Leigh
- ❖ early 1816: tryst w/ 17-yr-old Claire Clairmont; she gives birth to “Allegra” in Jan. 1817



by G. H. Harlow (c.1815)

# Sexual Experience

---

- ❖ April 25, 1816; leaves England once public learns of his dealings w/ boys and half-sister
- ❖ 1817: arrives in Venice and sets to work; later tells of sexual trysts with 200+ ladies and prostitutes
- ❖ steady “affair” w/ young, married Teresa Guiccioli in Venice



by Thomas Phillips (c.1835)

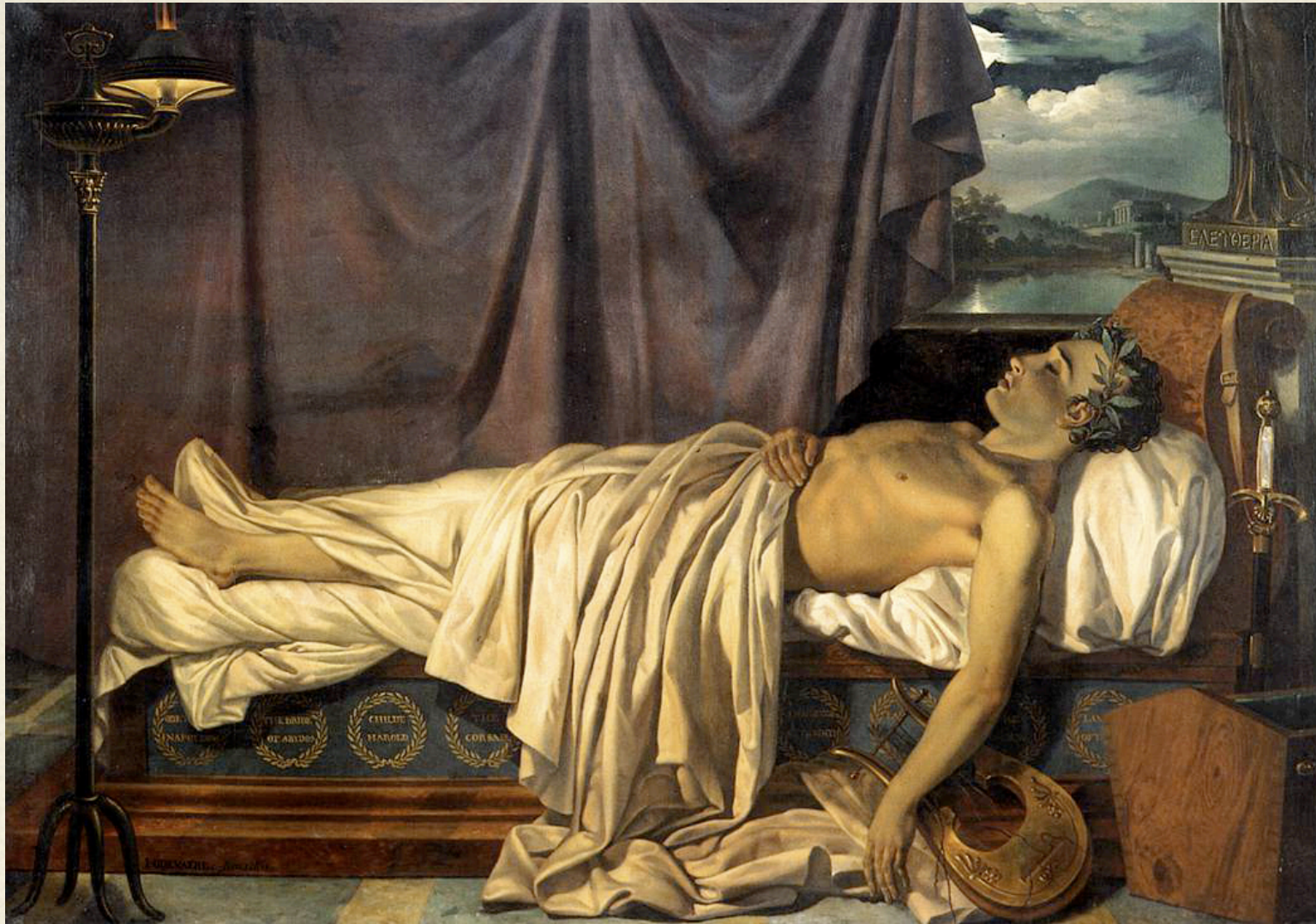
# Literary Creations

---

- ❖ 1807: *Hours of Idleness*
- ❖ 1809: “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers”
- ❖ 1812: publishes 1st 2 cantos of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*
- ❖ 1813: “The Giaour,” 1 of 4 “Turkish” tales
- ❖ 1816: continues work on *Childe Harold* after leaving England
- ❖ 1818: begins *Don Juan*



by Thomas Phillips (1814)



“Lord Byron on His Deathbed”  
by Joseph-Denis Odevaere (1826)

# Mary W. Godwin (1797-1851)

---

- ❖ beautiful at young age
- ❖ education at home
- ❖ family close to debt often
- ❖ guilt over mother's death
- ❖ siblings: Fanny Imlay, Charles Clairmont, Claire Clairmont
- ❖ 1814: elopes w/ P. B. Shelley



by Richard Rothwell (1840)

# Life w/ P. B. Shelley: 1814

---

- ❖ July 28: Mary & P. B. S. elope
- ❖ Sept. 13: couple returns to England
- ❖ Harriet gives birth to 2nd child
- ❖ Percy often away from home w/ Claire Clairmont to dodge creditors
- ❖ Percy tries to encourage free love in Mary (w/ Thomas Jefferson Hogg)

# Life w/ P. B. Shelley: 1815

---

- ❖ Feb. 15: Mary's first child (baby girl) is born two months premature
- ❖ Mar. 6: child dies; depression follows
- ❖ P. B. Shelley's grandfather dies



# Life w/ P. B. Shelley: 1816

---

- ❖ Jan. 24: Mary gives birth to 2nd child, “William”
- ❖ May: couple leaves to visit Geneva w/ CC & LB
- ❖ summer: Mary conceives *Frankenstein*
- ❖ Oct. 9: Mary receives letters from Fanny Imlay (half-sister). Oct. 10: Fanny found dead by laudanum
- ❖ Dec. 10: Harriet Shelley (PBS’s wife) drowns self in Serpentine lake in Hyde Park
- ❖ Dec. 30: Mary and P. B. Shelley marry

# Life w/ P. B. Shelley: 1817

---

- ❖ Jan. 13: Claire gives birth to “Alba” (later “Allegra”)
- ❖ Chancery Court ruling
- ❖ March: Shelleys & Claire settle at Albion House
- ❖ Sept. 2: Mary gives birth to 3rd child, “Clara”
- ❖ summer: Mary finishes expanding *Frankenstein*
- ❖ publishes *History of a Six Week’s Tour* (contains 1814 journal from continental journey, 1816 letters while in Switzerland, and PBS’s “Mont Blanc”)

# Life w/ P. B. Shelley: 1818-22

---

- ❖ Jan. 1818: *Frankenstein* published anonymously
- ❖ Mar. 1818: couple leaves for Italy
- ❖ Sept. 1818: Mary's 3rd child, "Clara," dies of dysentery
- ❖ June 1819: Mary's 2nd child, "William" dies of malaria
- ❖ Nov. 1819: Mary's 4th child, "Percy Florence," born
- ❖ 1822: Mary miscarries 5th child and almost dies herself

# Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

---

- ❖ wealthy family
- ❖ educated at Eton; short-lived education at Oxford
- ❖ eccentric, slight; bullied
- ❖ despises “chains” of *gratitude, obligation, & modesty*
- ❖ financially generous (w/ Godwin & others)
- ❖ believes in free love
- ❖ drowns in 1822



by Amelia Curran (1819)

# Relationships

---

- ❖ 1811-16: Harriet Westbrook
- ❖ 1814-1822: Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin
- ❖ 1820-22: Pisan Circle of Friends (Lord Byron, Edward Trelawny, Edward Williams & his common-law wife Jane)
- ❖ 1822: drowns along w/ Edward Williams in open boat the *Don Juan* during storm

# Some Political Publications

---

- ❖ *The Necessity of Atheism* (1810)
- ❖ *Address to the Irish People* (1812)
- ❖ long poem *Queen Mab* (1813)
- ❖ “The Mask of Anarchy” (1819; 1832)
- ❖ “A Song: “Men of England”” (1819; 1839)
- ❖ “England in 1819” (1819; 1839)

# Poet as Prophet

---

- ❖ “Mont Blanc” (1816; 1817)
- ❖ “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” (1816; 1817)
- ❖ “Ozymandias” (1817; 1818)
- ❖ “Ode to the West Wind” (1819; 1820)
- ❖ 604-line love lyric *Epipsychidion* (1820)
- ❖ “A Defence of Poetry” (1821)

*roman à clef*  
(a novel with a “key”)

a story directly informed by actual events and individuals, but disguised by the veil of fiction



# Mary Shelley as *Lionel*

---

- ❖ Lionel's love for Adrian (36 top)
- ❖ love of authorship (157 bottom)
- ❖ analytical approach to human behavior (174 mid)
- ❖ grief at a child's slow death (434-35)
- ❖ grief & near-despair following loss of loved ones (453 mid)

# Lord Byron as *Raymond*

---

- ❖ a man of contradictions (40 mid)
- ❖ loved by many women (48 mid, 118 mid)
- ❖ “active life was the genuine soil for his virtues” (119)
- ❖ believed in fate over choice (122-23)
- ❖ a lover of pleasure (148 mid)

# Percy Bysshe Shelley as *Adrian*

---

“Adrian, the matchless brother of my soul, the sensitive and excellent Adrian, loving all, and beloved by all, yet seemed destined not to find the half of himself, which was to complete his happiness. He often left us, and wandered by himself in the woods, or sailed in his little skiff, his books his only companions” (91).

# Percy Bysshe Shelley as *Adrian*

---

“The sadness which which [Adrian] had first heard that the plague was in London had vanished [now that he knows he will become Protector]; the energy of his purpose informed his body with strength, the solemn joy of enthusiasm and self-devotion illuminated his countenance; and the weakness of his physical nature seemed to pass from him . . .” (246).

# Percy Bysshe Shelley as *Adrian*

---

“How lovely is devotion! Here was a youth, royally sprung, bred in luxury, by nature averse to the usual struggles of a public life, and now, in time of danger, at a period when to live was the utmost scope of the ambitious, he, the beloved and heroic Adrian, made, in sweet simplicity, an offer to sacrifice himself for the public good” (251).

# Percy Bysshe Shelley as *Adrian*

---

“Did [Adrian’s] languid air attest that he also was struck with contagion? How long, when I look on this matchless specimen of mortality, may I perceive that his thought answers mine?” (418).

“Oh! grief is fantastic; it weaves a web on which to trace the history of its woe from every form and change around; it incorporates itself with all living nature; it finds sustenance to every object . . .” (446).