

Type; Last Survivor. Author;
Class;
Code; (Pseud)

SHELLEY : MARY

Title "THE LAST MAN"

Subtitling;

Pub; Paris, A & W Galignani. Date; 1826. Price; Pages 685.

Further Information; This edition is in three volumes. First published in London the same year, 1826.

Synopsis of plot; Homo Sapiens destroyed by plague in future.

Review; By Peter W. Clarke.

This novel must be classed as one of the unjustly forgotten, and I suppose most of the people who are well acquainted with "Frankenstein" have not heard of, much less read, "The Last Man". It is one of several attempts at the fantasy idiom by this authoress, also notable being "The Mortal Immortal".

The scene of the novel is laid between the years 2092 and 2100, and Mrs Shelley exhibits poverty of imagination when she describes the political and social life of that era. The only scientific progress made since 1826 is the invention of a passenger balloon service. The political system is of the 1820 vintage, which is strangely reminiscent of how American writers move their present capitalist system into the far future. Two of the main characters are Raymond, based on Lord Byron, and Adrian, which is Shelley, and the entire work is about three times the length of "Frankenstein".

From out of the East comes an irresistible plague, killing off everybody except the narrator - the only person to recover. Constantinople is struck in 2092, and next year the pestilence reaches Greece, Italy and France, arriving at London in 2094. By 2096 very few people remain and these decide to migrate to Paris, where they split into two groups and begin to fight and squabble over religious beliefs. However when summer arrives the plague finishes them all off. The sole survivor wanders over Italy chalking his name on the walls of dead towns and shouting through the doors of empty houses. London is weed-covered and cows graze in the streets. The book is quite convincingly written, although it naturally suffers by the archaic expressions and idiom used - though this may be an advantage to those who like this sort of thing - but its main fault lies in its extreme length.

The above is an example of a review and details of a fantasy book produced on a standardised form, which J Michael Rosenblum would like to see adopted by most, if not all, fanzine producers who include book reviews within their pages. Then they could run off an extra 100 or so copies, on blank sheets (as is being done with the BR portion of this sheet) to be distributed to those fantasy bibliophiles taking part in the scheme. The idea has been mooted through the columns of "Browsing" to the FAPA, and several pledges of support have been given. I hope to include such reviews in both my publications at frequent intervals, and would be grateful to anybody who can co-operate by preparing competent reviews. At the moment the field of operation is almost virgin, so anyone who possesses a single book can join in.

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