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The Mammoth's Part in the World's Demise. Of the End of Humanity in Early Science Fiction

Anna Mayer

- 1 The demise of humanity has been a theme in literature for as long as we can trace back the written word. It is fundamentally linked to religious concepts. The narratological structure of apocalyptic writing in the Occident sphere radically changed during the Romantic era. At the core of storytelling the transition into the afterworld is no longer found, but rather there is an end to human life on earth. Eschatology develops to merely provide aesthetic means. This new approach to apocalyptic writing gives way to new topics, which were not treated before, namely socio-political issues. Romantic science fiction novels, which set place in the distance future imagining the demise of humanity deal with scientific achievements and cope with vast political and social changes.
- 2 In this Article I mainly concentrate on two novels, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and *Le dernier homme* (1805) by Jean-Baptiste Francois Cousin de Grainville. Having had little success in France, Grainville's oeuvre was published in an anonymous English translation in London under the title *The Last Man, or Omegarus and Syderia a Romance in Futurity* (1806). Following Grainville's lead, the English Romantic epoch was marked by apocalyptic scenarios, like Byron's poem *Darkness* (1816), Campelle's poem *The Last Man* (1823), Beddoe's play *The Last Man* (1890; published postmortem) and Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man* (1826). The upward trend of the motif of the last human being on earth can already be spotted in the titles. Nevertheless, the similarities go far beyond this as we will see in this analysis.

I. Romantic times

- 3 As a first step I will embed the works in a wider context of Romantic arts. The aesthetic features, which determines eschatologic scenarios are of course not exclusive to this

genre. Being a fundamental part of the Romantic epoch, the aesthetics of Last Man scenarios reoccur throughout the arts.

- 4 In the text *Les Ruines ou Méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (1791) by Constantin Volney, the writer explores the Romantic fascination for ruins for the first time. Volney's protagonist walks through the ruins of Palmyra in Syria and reflects on the demise of cultures. Palmyra is also the place where the fate of humanity is revealed in Grainville's work *Le dernier homme*. The long deserted city was of great interest to the European society of the late 18th century. This can be traced back to an English expedition from 1751.
- 5 It started in Rome and encompassed traveling through the Middle East (Syria, Palestine) and Egypt.¹ The journey's most impressive discoveries, among them Palmyra, were documented. Robert Wood's and James Dawkins' explorations of the Syrian city were published after their return under the title *Les ruines de Palmyre, autrement dite: Tedmor au désert* (1753). They did not only document their findings but also tried to reconstruct the history of the archaeological remains in order to satisfy the curiosity of the audience.

Quand par qui a-t-elle été fondée ? D'où vient qu'elle se située si singulièrement, séparée du reste du genre humain par un désert inhabitable ? Et quelle a dû être source des richesses nécessaires pour soutenir sa magnificence ? Voilà des sujets qui engagent très naturellement notre attention aussi allons nous tâcher de satisfaire en quelque sorte cette curiosité.²
- 6 It seems like Volney – just as Grainville – had been familiar with the explorations of Wood and Dawkins, using Palmyra as the scenery for his work. In the preface of Volney's work the narrator admires the ruins. Their sight moves him deeply and evokes two contradicting feelings: admiration for the beauty and melancholy at the thought of the human volatility. This contradiction is a fundamental theme of the Romantic epoch, especially of apocalyptic scenarios.
- 7 According to Claus Träger, isolation can be understood as a creative method of Romanticism. He speaks of an internalization of the Robinsonade: instead of being totally isolated on an island, the artists isolate by turning away from society and focusing on the inner world.³ This focus on subjectivity also manifests itself in literature. During the Romantic times numerous poems find the light of day, which try to give an insight on personal feelings and experiences, as we can read in Wordsworth's poem *I wandered lonely as a cloud* (1807).
- 8 Desolation is an important theme in the Romantic painting. Caspar David Friedrich, one of the most important German painters of the Romantic era, is well known for his isolated figures seen from the back set in nature paintings.⁴ *Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*⁵ shows a middle-aged man, who is depicted with his back to the viewer. Standing on a rock, he overlooks black mountains. Between him and the mountain range lies a sea of white clouds. The horizon and the sky blur into each other. *Mönch am Meer*⁶ shows the back of a man dressed in a cowl on a shore, before him stretches the deep blue sea, which can only be distinguished from the sky by a fine shade. The painted figures resemble the motif of the Last Man: in absolute isolation they are exposed to nature alone.⁷ Friedrich writes, that his landscapes are not only paintings of what he has seen but a depiction of his inner life.⁸ An interesting fact about Friedrich is that isolation also played a big role in his private life. While his colleagues in Dresden had a vivid collaboration, Friedrich basically worked alone and suffered from severe depression in his later years.⁹

- 9 The Romantic times are understood as less political than the Enlightenment. Whereas during the French revolution art was seen as a political medium, Romantic artists do not primarily discuss political ideas in their works.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the assumption that Romantic art is unpolitical does not hold up to scrutiny. Already Friedrich's paintings prove otherwise. Motifs of war criticize Napoleon's occupation of Prussia and Saxony.¹¹ The painting *Chasseur im Walde*¹² shows for example a French soldier, who seems lost as he is seen from behind, surrounded by high trees. The painting was finished 1814, one year after Napoleon won the battle of Leipzig. Friedrich was not the only one – most of his contemporaries shared his anti-Napoleonic attitude.¹³ While literature was not in its primary purpose a medium to distribute political ideas, politics still inconspicuously permeated the field. In the upcoming chapter we will discuss the socio-political interest, which can be spotted in the Last Man scenarios.

II. Political Changes

- 10 Malthus published his work *An Essay on the Principals of Population* in the very late 18th century, during the time of the Industrial revolution. England underwent tremendous economical and political changes at that time. Besides the ongoing process of conquest and colonization, two social classes developed: employees and workers. Technical innovation and economical restructuring took place. In a very short time inventions such as the Hargreaves spinning-machine appeared, trying to make work more effective. Thousands of workers became unemployed. Poverty was an urging problem.
- 11 During the 18th century Europe had to face a growing population. In Great Britain alone it rose from 6.3 million people in 1750 to 21 million people in 1850.¹⁴ Until the 19th century the situation deteriorated. The difference between rich and poor became bigger and so did the cohesion of the social classes, stirring up the revolutionary potential of the underclasses. The supply of the growing population became a serious problem. Crop failure immediately lead to hunger crises, as it was the case in 1789, 1795, 1817 and 1832.¹⁵
- 12 Those circumstances of poverty and misery are a precondition of Malthus' theory. He stated that shortage of resources is due to overpopulation. Only two factors can prevent the growth of people, which he calls positive and preventative checks. Positive checks are all factors which reduce the expectancy of life – for example wars, epidemics or natural catastrophes. The term preventive checks describes everything that decreases the birth rate – for example abortion, or the marital age.¹⁶ The consequences he draws from his observations have often been criticized. He refused every kind of social assistance because poverty is a crucial factor, which deteriorates population.
- 13 Mary Shelley did not share Malthus' fear of overpopulation and the consequences for the poor. In her novel *The Last Man* humans slowly die of an unpredictable disease, for which nobody knows a cure. Every life has to be fought for. It is only through the care for the sick, that humans can survive.
- I [Verney] went also to act in conformity with Adrian's plans, which was to congregate in masses what remained of the population; for he possessed the conviction that it was only through the benevolent and social virtues that any safety was to be hoped for the remnant of mankind.¹⁷
- 14 The shortage of resources as predicted in Malthus' theory does not exist in Shelley's novel. If there is a lack of something, it is of skills and workers. Fields are no longer cultivated, fruits are no longer harvested and rot on trees. There are enough resources

for all the survivors, but there is a lack of human labor to transform those raw materials into food. Cultural skills acquired through time get lost, because nobody practices them anymore. Crossing rivers becomes a potentially lethal adventure, as there are no more experienced sailors.

Some, in the true spirit of reckless enterprise, went on board a ship of an hundred and twenty guns; [...] The crew, many of whom had never seen the sea before, felt indeed as if heaven and earth came running together, as the vessel dipped her bows in the waves, or rose high upon them. [...] As the sun went down, the gale increased; the ship seemed to feel her danger, she was now completely water-logged, and presented other indications of setting before she went down.¹⁸

- 15 Malthus develops his theory at the end of the 18th century. Statistics such as birth and death rates become more and more important. A new understanding of society occurs: the individual becomes less important and the population is understood as something in need of regulation. Sexual reproduction is no longer only a private matter but also a public one, which has to be regulated, along with regulations for newly developed innovations, such as health insurance and pensions.¹⁹ For Malthus, famine is not an unpredictable disaster but a consequence resulting from overpopulation. In Shelley's novel the human demise means the demise of cultural skills and institutional infrastructure. Instead of controlling population growth by what Malthus calls positive and preventive checks, Shelley describes the care for sick people as a necessary means to save humanity from its demise. But underlying her thoughts there is the same definition of society as a mass, in need of regulation. Goods have to be distributed equally between people. Property has to be divided, wealthier people host poorer people.
- 16 From a socio-political perspective, Shelley describes a totally different scenario than Malthus. The difference between rich and poor has to be reduced in order to keep humans alive for as long as possible. Also the disease does not make a difference between rich and poor. Whereas Malthus' famine especially hits the lower class, Shelley's plague evens out the class differences in its effect and the social consequences.
- 17 Thomas Hood, a contemporary of Shelley's, wrote a critical answer to Malthus' theory. In his sarcastic poem he writes: „When if I understand the thing you mean, / We ought to import the Cholera Morbus!“ Hood combines Malthus' and Shelley's futuristic visions, describing Malthus fear of overpopulation, showing that an epidemic would solve those problems. The contradiction of those two scenarios is made clear in Hood's poem.
- 18 Finally, it should be mentioned that Shelley, also as a political thinker, was opposed to Malthus theory. „[...] Malthus is the work from which all the rich have ever since it has been written, borrowed excuses and palliations for their luxury and hardheartedness“²⁰ she wrote in her diary.
- 19 Grainville's novel is much closer to Malthus' horror scenario than Shelley's work. The whole society suffers under severe famine. The entire earth is barren. Humans can no longer survive not only because of the supply shortages, but also because no other offspring can be born. While Malthus thinks overpopulation is responsible for the shortage of food, Grainville describes the absolut hopelessness of human's continuous existence because they can not provide their own food, nor can they reproduce. The parallels between the two texts, which were written at the same time, were already noticed by Michelet. In his work *Histoire du XIXe siècle : Jusqu'à Waterloo* (1875) he dedicates a chapter to Grainville, saying : „Cette terrible préoccupation de la famine n'est pas, au reste, particulière à la France de ce temps. [...] un autre poème non moins de fiction [...]

paraît en Angleterre, un livre qu'on pourrait appeler l'Économie du désespoir. Je parle du livre de Malthus."²¹

- 20 Malthus' fear of overpopulation is discussed in a short episode of the scenario. Philanthor, a scholar brews an elixir, through which one can live forever. Philanthor is asked to give away the recipe, but fearing that people will not die anymore and that the resources are not enough for everybody, he decides not to. „C'est avec délices qu'il se disposait à révéler son secret ; [...] Il craignit, s'il donnait à l'homme le pouvoir de prolonger ses jours, que la terre ne pût nourrir l'immense population qui la couvrirait."²² Here however, Grainville's idea resembles Malthus': the population increases, so that the capacity of the earth would no longer be enough someday to feed them.
- 21 Not only thematical similarities catch one's eye. Grainville understands society, as Malthus and Shelley, as a mass of people, which has to be managed. It was not until the late 18th century, that this definition of society occurred. Control mechanisms such as health insurance or birth control became a pressing issue. Statistics allowed to foresee and plan for future needs of society. The individual is obsolete from this point of view.²³ Philanthor's episode is a good example for that, another episode, which makes Grainville's definition of society clear, is Omrus' project of emptying the oceans. Omrus realizes that not enough food will be available for further development of the population. For Omrus, the solution seems to be to move the entire human race from the face of the earth to the seabed, since the soil is more fertile there. Unfortunately the project failed because of humanity's idleness. „Ce n'est point assez, leur [peuples] dit-il [Omrus], d'avoir changé les fleuves, les étangs, les lacs en des campagnes fertiles. Vous avez besoin de plus grandes ressources ;[...]. Faites avec moi la conquête de l'Océan[...]."²⁴ The construction project is, however, just as Shelley's health care plan an attempt to regulate and plan the future of the people.

III. Geological Excavations

- 22 It seems like a contradiction that there would be similarities between the idea of prehistoric times and that of the distant future. In his work on romantic illustrations, Peter Schneyder has pointed out that there are aesthetic parallels between the representations of primitive times and doomsday scenarios in the future.²⁵
- 23 Geological research on the prehistoric times had its debut in the second half of the 18th century. Archaeological excavations showed, that there was life on earth which ceased to exist sometime along the way to the present. Studying earth's history burst the contemporary idea of divine creation and was a source of fascination and conflicts.
- 24 Cuvier is one of the well known pioneering geologists. His method – anatomie comparée – is presented in his work *Discours sur les Révolutions de la surface du Globe, et sur les changements qu'elles ont produits dans le règne animal*²⁶ (1825). Claiming that there are categories of living creatures which are fundamentally different and therefore have no common evolutionary ancestry, he opposed the concept of evolution and became the main figure of catastrophism. By now catastrophism is an outdated theory, in the early 19th century however, it still had significant credibility. According to Cuvier, the history of the earth should not be considered as one continuous development, but as a series of unrelated episodes of development of life, disrupted by huge catastrophes causing the extinction of living creatures such as the mammoth.

Pour-quoi les entrailles de la terre n'ont-elles point conservé monument d'une généalogie si curieuse, si ce n'est parce que les espèces d'autrefois étaient aussi constantes que les nôtres, ou du moins parce que la catastrophe qui les a détruites ne leur a laissé le temps de se livrer à leur variations ?²⁷

- 25 Catastrophism wasn't of great importance to science, because 30 years later Darwin's theory of evolution had gained the upper hand. Nevertheless, Cuvier's fame shows that the extinction of species – the temporal restriction of living creatures on earth – became the center of attention not only for scientists but for the entire upper class. Jane Austen's *Emma* for example, desires to read Cuvier's work.²⁸
- 26 Cuvier's speech on the *espèce perdue* at the Académie française on February 6th 1796 is still mentioned, as he presented the scientific evidence for the extinction of prehistoric species. He showed that there exist two species of elephants and that a third one – the mammoth – must have existed. Six years later, in London's Pall Mall Hall a skeleton of a seemingly complete Mammoth was exhibited. All missing bones were replaced by wood imitations.²⁹ Visitors were attracted by the fossil, not only out of pure scientific interest but also because of the horror and fear the humongous animal caused. The exhibition guide shows that the researchers were very aware of this, mixing scientifically proven facts with assumptions or even fantasies, inventing a story around the fossil.³⁰
- 27 Discoveries of artifacts of the prehistoric times shook the very foundations of humanity. The consequences can be understood as a narcissistic wound in the Freudian sense. Freud claims that not only individuals but also society was in a narcissistic state. The construction of this world, as well as of the afterworld was built up around the human existence. It is through scientific unveiling that humans realize the arbitrariness of their existence. Freud speaks of three major narcissistic crises (*Kränkungen*). The first took place in the 16th century, when Copernicus discovered that the earth is not the center of the universe. The second was Darwin's theory of evolution, which made clear that humans and animals share a common ancestor. The third major crisis was the discovery of the subconscious, stating that part of the human psyche evades our consciousness.³¹ The discovery of the primitive times can also be understood as a narcissistic wound. In terms of consequences and fatality for the human self-perception it resembles Copernicus' scientific achievement. „Die erste [Kränkung], als sie [die Menschheit] erfuhr, daß unsere Erde nicht der Mittelpunkt des Weltalls ist, sondern ein winziges Teilchen eines in seiner Größe kaum vorstellbaren Weltsystems.“³²
- 28 Cuvier and his colleagues undermined the Christian understanding of the creation of humanity. It was undeniable that the earth existed long before the humans did and that it might exist much longer. The human kind becomes one of many, not chosen in any sense. Secular apocalyptic scenarios occurred at the same time as science made clear that species had been extinct. Literature became a suitable frame to process the Freudian shock.
- 29 A fundamental question which occurs in this context is, what do humans leave behind when they are extinct? The attempt of reconstructing former life from scratches is something well known in geology. Cuvier always faced the problem of not having enough relics to make a proper statement. „Les faits qu'il m'a été donné de découvrir ne forment sans doute qu'une bien petite partie de ceux dont cette antique histoire devra se composer [...].“³³ Two fundamental motifs reoccur throughout apocalyptic literature to mourn about the incredible loss: books and abandoned buildings. In Schmidt's *Schwarze Spiegel* (1951) the protagonist is a writer spending the rest of his lonely life on writing and

reading, wandering through deserted Hamburg. Grainville's protagonist in *Le Dernier Homme* is looking for Paris but only finds the uninhabited ruins of a once glorious city. Also, Mary Shelley's protagonist has a profound reflection on what humanity leaves behind. Her whole text can be understood as the Last Man's account, as the fictitious attempt to write down the human demise. The narrator and fictitious writer of the story, Verney, hopes that one day there will be a recipient for his story, knowing that all human beings are extinct. This contradiction can be spotted in all Last Man scenarios: Following the logic of the text there is no possible reader for the book. Books and abandoned buildings as motifs for human accomplishments also reoccur in Shelley's oeuvre.³⁴ At several points of the book Verney asks himself what impression the relics of humanity would make on somebody, after all humans are gone. Looking at an Italian city he thinks to himself: „The wide square of Forlì, the arcade around it, its delight and pleasant aspect cheered me. I was pleased with the idea, that, if the earth should be again peopled, we, the lost race, would, in the relics left behind, present no contemptible exhibition of our power.“³⁵

IV. Human Nature

- 30 Apocalyptic scenarios describe humans in inhumane conditions – they describe a state of total exception, in which the human nature unravels in ways it cannot in a regular societal setting. The question central to all Last Man scenarios throughout time is: Are humans still capable of social interaction, or do they behave like cannibalistic beasts?
- 31 A contemporary example is McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006), which describes an hierarchic brutal society, in which the other can only be a source of danger for one's own life. Byron describes in his poem *Darkness* (1816) how earth becomes unfertile and humans become hideous and selfish creatures, whose sight alone would kill. Those scenarios are deeply rooted in Thomas Hobbes' thoughts, claiming that humans cannot live outside the institutional boundaries, which are provided by the state. „Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre as is of every man, against every man.“³⁶
- 32 Grainville's judgment on humanity is less negative. His protagonists are still capable of cooperation, even in situations where they are in incredible need. In *Le Dernier Homme* Grainville describes less the downfall of political institutions as does Shelley in her work.
- 33 Shelley's apocalyptic scenario sketches a quite different vision of humanity. Archaic political institutions fall apart, leaving a vacuum of social organization. Instead of civil war, social coherence becomes a premise for surviving. Despite her belief in human nature, Shelley's protagonists do not escape the total apocalypse. Her novel can be read as a rejection of the political enthusiasm during the 18th century.³⁷ Whereas in Shelley's parents' generation hope for improvement was never lost, Shelley disagrees deeply. She sees greatness in human accomplishments but she does not see the turn for the better.

Nature, our mother, and our friend, had turned on us a brow of menace. She showed us plainly, that, though she permitted us to assign her laws and subdue her apparent powers, yet, if she put forth but a finger, we must quake. She could take our globe, fringed with mountains, girded by the atmosphere, containing the condition of our being, and all that man's mind could invent or his force achieve,

she could take the ball in her hand, and cast it into space, where life would be drunk up, and man and all his efforts for ever annihilated.³⁸

V. Conclusion

- 34 Let's conclude in a final step the observations we have drawn from our analysis. A closer look at Romantic arts made clear, that desolation and demise are two central aspects. Volney's work showed that there was a profound interest in abandoned places, also outside the genre of Last Man scenarios. Caspar David Friedrich's motifs seem lost and lonesome. Although his paintings aren't apocalyptic, they seem like a depiction of the Last Man.
- 35 A new understanding of society as a mass in need of regulations occurred in the late 18th century. Epidemics and natural resources became the center of attention, as we have seen in our analysis of Malthus' work. Malthus as well as the two authors Grainville and Shelley do understand society as in need of regulations, as we can observe in the measurements they describe. Whereas Grainville portrays a very similar scenario to Malthus, Shelley does the complete opposite. In *The Last Man* there is no lack of resources, human life becomes the most precious good.
- 36 The discovery of the primitive times had a tremendous impact on the understanding of the history of the earth and on the human self-deception. This huge shift of the understanding of humanity also had an impact on literature. What will be left, once there are no more human beings, becomes a central question of this genre. Books and abandoned buildings are two major motifs in this context.
- 37 Finally, we can say that apocalyptic scenarios negotiate the core of human nature. Whereas apocalyptic scenarios tend to describe cannibalistic societies, which can not live without the institutions of a nation state, Shelley shows how in difficult times the collaboration between the protagonists increases.

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NOTES

1. cf. Robert Wood and James Dawkins, *Les ruines de Palmyre, autrement dite : Tedmor au désert* (Paris : Firmin Didot, 1819), VII.
2. cf. *ibid.*, 15.
3. cf. Claus Träger, "Ursprünge Und Stellung Der Romantik," in *Romantikforschung Seit 1945*, ed. Klaus Peter (Königstein : Hain, 1980), 318.
4. cf. Klaus Günzel, *Romantik in Dresden : Gestalten und Begegnungen* (Frankfurt am Main : Insel-Verl, 1997), 95f.

5. Caspar David Friedrich, *Der Wanderer Über Dem Nebelmeer*, oil on canvas, 1818, Hamburg Kunsthalle.
6. Caspar David Friedrich, *Der Mönch Am Meer*, oil on canvas, 1810, Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin.
7. The cover of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* published by Wordsworth in 2004 shows Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*.
8. cf. Wieland Schmied, *Caspar David Friedrich* (Köln : DuMont, 1992), 15.
9. cf. Petra Zagler, "Vom Abendrot zum Morgengrauen : Nachtbilder in der deutschen Romantik" (Dipl., Universität Wien, 2008), 117.
10. cf. Klaus Peter, *Romantikforschung Seit 1945* (Königstein : Hain, 1980), 178.
11. cf. Schmied, *Caspar David Friedrich*, 22.
12. Caspar David Friedrich, *Der Chasseur Im Wald*, 1814, private collection.
13. cf. Hermann Hofer, *Neues Handbuch Der Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Klaus Heitmann, vol. 15 (Wiebelsheim : Aula-Verl, 1982), 111.
14. cf. Ernst Engelke, *Theorien Der Sozialen Arbeit : Eine Einführung* (Freiburg : Lambertus, 2002), 93f.
15. cf. *ibid.*, 353ff.
16. Malthus thought that marriage and children are linked.
17. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Last Man* (Wordsworth, 2004), 245.
18. *Ibid.*
19. cf. Michel Foucault, *In Verteidigung Der Gesellschaft : Vorlesungen Am Collège de France (1975 - 76)* (Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 2001), 280ff.
20. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore : Hopkins University Press, 1988), 75.
21. Jules Michelet, *Histoire Du XIXe Siècle, III : Jusqu'à Waterloo* (Paris : Michel Lévy, 1875), 104.
22. Jean-Baptiste-François-Xavier Cousin de Grainville, *Le Dernier Homme*, ed. Anne Kupiec and Jules Michelet (Paris : Payot, 2010), 76.
23. cf. Foucault, *In Verteidigung Der Gesellschaft*, 280ff.
24. Cousin de Grainville, *Le Dernier Homme*, 82.
25. cf. Peter Schneyder, "Zurück in Die Zukunft. Der Geologe Des 19. Jahrhunderts Als 'Rückwärtsgekehrter Prophet'." (presented at the International conference. Das Wissen der Zukunft., Universität Wien, May 11, 2011).
26. Georges Cuvier, *Discours sur les révolutions de la surface du globe. Avec des notes, d'après les données les plus récentes de la science et une notice historique par Paul Bory.* (Paris : Berche et Tralin, 1881).
27. *Ibid.*, 80.
28. cf. Ralph O'Connor, *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802-1856* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 65.
29. cf. Ilse Jahn and Michael Schmitt, *Darwin & Co: eine Geschichte der Biologie in Portraits* (München : C.H. Beck, 2001), 34.
30. cf. O'Connor, *The Earth on Show*, 42f. Of course the scientific method differed a lot from today's. Packing scientific information into easy readable essays was a normal technique. It was not until the late 19th century, that the division of science and arts was completed. (cf. James G. Paradis, *Victorian Science and Victorian Values : Literary Perspectives* (New York : Academy of Sciences, 1981), 112f.
31. cf. Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Schriften von Sigmund Freud.*, vol. 7 (Leipzig : Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1924), 294f.
32. *Ibid.*, 7 :294.
33. Cuvier, *Discours sur les révolutions de la surface du globe. Avec des notes, d'après les données les plus récentes de la science et une notice historique par Paul Bory.*, 3.
34. cf. Shelley, *The Last Man*, 2004, 344 ; 362.
35. *Ibid.*, 362.
36. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London : Oxford University Press, 1939), 96.

37. cf. Lee Sterrenburg, "The Last Man : Anatomy of Failed Revolutions," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* no. 3 (January 1, 1978) : 332.

38. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Last Man* (Philadelphia : Carey, 1833), 203.

ABSTRACTS

The demise of humanity has been a theme in literature for as long as we can trace back the written word. The narratological structure of apocalyptic writing in the Occident sphere radically changed during the Romantic era. At the core of storytelling the transition into the afterworld is no longer found, but rather there is an end to human life on earth. The following analysis attempts to show how Last Man scenarios reflect on political change and reference scientific achievements of the time. Departing from Malthus' theory on population I focus on the socio- political idea, which is developed in these works. The discovery of prehistoric species can be illustrated in terms of a narcissistic wound, as described by Freud. Apocalyptic scenarios turn into a suitable frame to face these natural scientific findings. Finally, I concentrate on the idea of human being which is negotiated in those works.

La disparition de l'humanité est un thème littéraire qui remonte aussi loin que l'écriture. A l'époque romantique, la structure narratologique de la littérature apocalyptique en Occident a radicalement changé. Le cœur du récit ne décrit plus une transition vers l'au-delà, mais la fin de la vie humaine sur terre. Cet article tente de montrer comment les scénarios du Dernier Homme reflètent un changement politique ainsi que les résultats scientifiques de l'époque. A partir de la théorie de Malthus sur la population, je me concentre sur la dimension socio-politique qui est développée dans les œuvres. La découverte d'espèces préhistoriques peut être décrite comme une blessure narcissique, selon l'analyse de Freud. Les scénarios apocalyptiques deviennent alors un cadre approprié pour faire face à ces nouvelles découvertes scientifiques. Enfin, j'analyse la représentation de l'être humain qui est proposée dans ces œuvres.

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