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THE LAST MAN AND GOTHIC SYMPATHY

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The Last Man and Gothic Sympathy

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Abstract This *Element* explores the theme of ‘Gothic sympathy’ as it appears in a collection of ‘Last Man’ novels. A liminal site of both possibility and irreconcilability, Gothic sympathy at once challenges the anthropocentric bias of traditional notions of sympathetic concern, premising compassionate relations with other beings – animal, vegetal, and so on – beyond the standard measure of the liberal-humanist subject, and at the same time acknowledges the horror that is the ineluctable and untranslatable otherness accompanying, interrupting and shaping such a sympathetic connection. Many examples of ‘Last Man’ fiction explore the dialectical impasse of Gothic sympathy by dramatising complicated relationships between a lone liberal-humanist subject and (often monstrous) other-than-human or posthuman subjects that will persist beyond humanity’s extinction. Such confrontations as they appear in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* and Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend* will be explored.

Keywords: Gothic, sympathy, last man, apocalypse, science fiction

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